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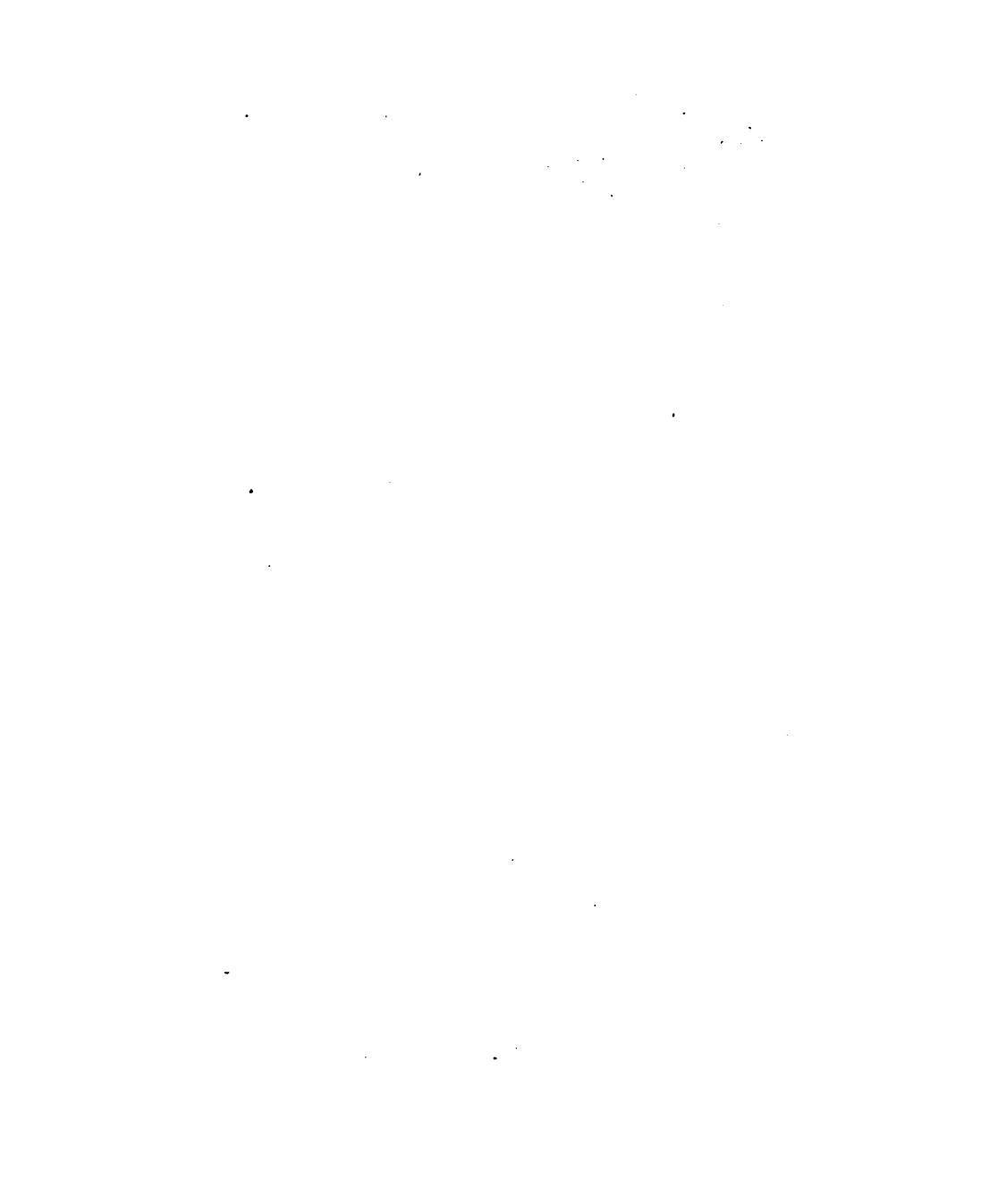




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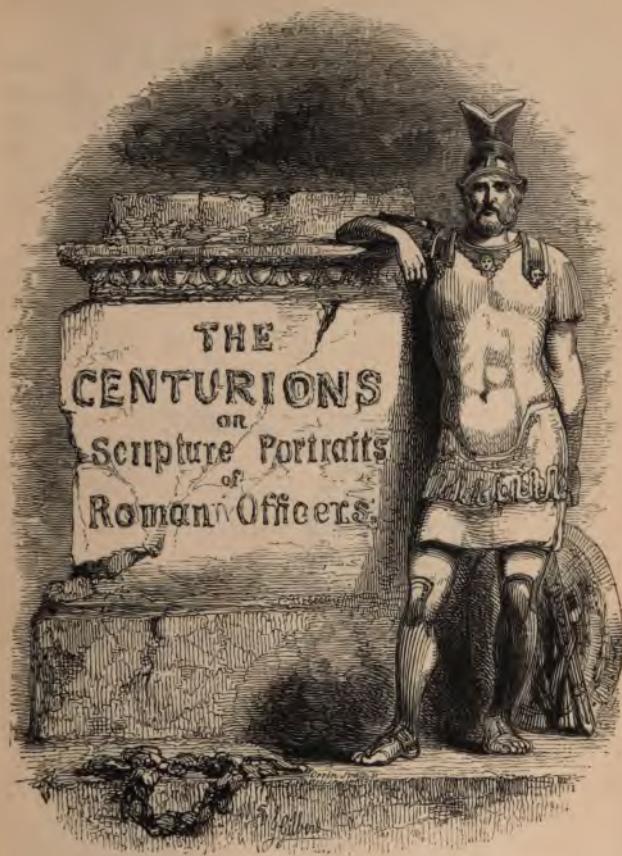
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THE CENTURIONS.

PRINTED BY L. AND G. SEELEY, THAMES DITTON, SURREY.



PUBLISHED BY R. E. SEELEY AND W. BURNSIDE:
AND SOLD BY L. AND G. SEELEY,
FLEET STREET, LONDON.
MDCCCLXII.





THE CENTURIONS;

OR

SCRIPTURE PORTRAITS

OF

ROMAN OFFICERS.



“I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel!”—MATT. viii. 10.

PUBLISHED BY R. B. SEELEY AND W. BURNSIDE:
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PREFACE.

THERE are circumstances which invest with peculiar interest the character of the Roman centurion, as it is delineated in the Scriptures. Those victorious armies, which during a long protracted warfare had won for themselves a reputation superior to all the troops of the world, were at length, like our own, reposing in comparative peace; and the genius of the nation, for years engrossed with the tumult of military excitement, had found leisure to devote itself to the cultivation of knowledge, and, for a season at least, to the civilization of mankind. The emperor Augustus, satisfied with the extent of his dominions,¹ had limited his ambition to the honourable task of defining, consolidating, and improving the vast countries already be-

¹ Tacitus. Ann. i. 9.

neath his sway ; and his successors as far as Nero, in which period is comprehended the Gospel history, had equally abandoned the endeavour, if not the desire, of adding to the conquests of their predecessors. The army therefore was distributed throughout the empire ;¹ and the legions, which during the career of the first Cæsar, had been engaged in ceaseless activity, were now stationed along the frontiers, and in the principal towns of Italy, and her provinces.

But although war was almost at an end, yet the services of the army had by no means ceased to be necessary. On some of the frontiers, nations subdued, but still eager to emancipate themselves, were to be sedulously guarded : large tracts of country were only to be retained by the presence of an armed force ; and succours were always to be ready to pour into Italy, should any unforeseen calamity call for their assistance. In Judæa, the scene to which our attention will be directed, tumults, plots, and insurrections, were continually requiring

¹ Tacitus Ann. iv. 5.

military interference; and the sway of the Romans, absolute, but perhaps in their case almost of necessity variable, seems to have contributed to these incessant troubles.

Instead of laying down, and persevering in a certain form of government for the province from its first subjection; either confirming the monarchy, as they found it, or substituting altogether a viceroy of their own; or devising some generous system adapted to the wants of the people, they varied their treatment at the discretion of the emperors, upon whose will it entirely depended. Thus in the case of the first Herod,¹ after having ruled the country, first by a Roman general, then partly by Jewish procurators, they now established a native as king, with power to nominate his successor. Yet at his death even Augustus set aside his will;² and dividing the kingdom into four tetrarchies, distributed them according to his own pleasure³ amongst that monarch's three sons.⁴ Again, upon the misbehaviour of one of them, Archelaus, ethnarch of Judæa, he deposed, and

¹ Josephus i. 7.

² Tacitus Hist. v. 9.

³ Josephus ii. 6.

⁴ Ibid. ii. 8.

banished him, reduced his ethnarchy into a province, and once more appointed a Roman as its governor. On the other hand, when Philip, another of the sons, died, to whom Trachonitis,¹ and the northern parts of Palestine had been allotted, the regal dignity was restored to his successor by Caligula, whilst a larger kingdom was subsequently modelled in favour of the same individual by Claudius,² and confirmed and augmented by Nero. In the meanwhile a Roman procurator continued to preside over Judæa; and Pilate, Felix, and Festus almost successively ruled that province with greater powers than those of the native monarchs. It would be easier to account for, than to defend, this capricious policy, which, having originated in the conflicts between the rival chieftains of Rome, each of whom, as he gained the ascendancy, placed those in authority from whom he expected the most devoted assistance, was continued by the intrigues and crimes of the royal family of Herod, acting upon the passions of despotic emperors. Had these been alive to

¹ Josephus ii. 9.

² Ibid ii. 12.

the just claims, which all men have upon those who govern them ; and, anticipating the conduct pursued by the most virtuous of their successors, had determined to retain them in allegiance, by carefully inquiring into their wants, and applying the proper remedies ; the miseries, which so soon overwhelmed Judea, might, humanly speaking, have been averted, and that unhappy country have long remained a valuable appendage to the empire.

But what we would particularly remark, is the power, which this absolute subjection of the descendants of Herod would naturally throw into the hands of the Romans ; whilst the distracted state of the community, would still further increase the authority of men, who possessing the strongholds and fortresses, were continually summoned to keep the inhabitants in order. In such a state of society discipline would not be relaxed, nor the army cease to be an honourable profession ; and thus, although the private soldiers were now recruited from the humblest classes, and from all parts of the empire ; yet the officers were in general men of birth and education ; or else, according to the

established rules of the service, selected from the ranks for their merit.

Mingling then as they did, with the natives, and exercising, by the nature of their occupation, a powerful control over them, we feel a curiosity to know, not only whether the sojourn of a Roman centurion was a blessing or a misfortune to a colony; but also in what degree mankind in general may be edified by their behaviour. Happily that behaviour has been pourtrayed by witnesses of no ordinary veracity: and whilst we thankfully accept the pages of Scripture as an invaluable light to secular history, it gives us a high opinion of that distinguished army, that, whenever its officers are mentioned by the inspired penmen, we look in vain for expressions of censure, whilst some trait is invariably recorded at least of an amiable disposition, if not of nobler qualities. Five times are they introduced in the New Testament, from the beginning of our Lord's ministry to the last journey of St. Paul to Rome, and, whether the dangers and uncertainties of war had awakened them to serious reflection, or disgust at the vices by which they were surrounded, had

impelled them to purer things ; whether the eager pursuit of distinction had sobered down into a perception of what is really good, or whether the care long paid by the Romans in the selection of their officers, and the strict discipline required of them, had been attended with their just results ; whether the military stationed in Judea were early in imbibing the gentle spirit of Christianity now dawning upon that country, or, lastly, whether the same providence, which had changed war into peace, had been also pleased to signalize its power by converting the hearts of those, who were most closely connected with that exciting occupation—certain it is that, from the specimens preserved in the pages of revelation, they appear to have set a bright example to the colonists ; and to have been a polished, benevolent, and in some instances most devout class of men.

Two of these centurions are recorded in terms of high distinction ; the others incidentally, and rather as if called into notice by their regular discharge of duty, than for any extraordinary merit. This circumstance however rather adds to, than detracts from our favourable opinion

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of the body ; since if the tribunes were in the habit of selecting particular individuals for especial services, it shews what sort of men they preferred employing ; and if they were not selected, they may be taken as fair samples of the remainder. It is proposed to consider these in the first place, and then to enter upon the history of the former two : and whether we have any connection with military duties, or not ; yet, if we can learn a useful lesson, let us not neglect it, even if it should come from men of a different profession.

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CHAPTER I.

THE CENTURION AT OUR LORD'S CRUCIFIXION.

MATT. xxvii. 54. MARK xv. 39. LUKE xxiii. 47.

The rank of a centurion—The centurion's conduct previous to the arrival at Calvary—The cross laid upon Simon—The fitness of the centurion to judge of the character of Jesus—His anxiety during the crucifixion—His teachableness—The marvels of the crucifixion—His conviction of the divinity of Christ—Consequences of his faith to Christianity—To himself—And to the world—Claims of the Bible upon military men.

THE first centurion, to whom we are introduced subsequently to the one, whose servant was sick at Capernaum, is the officer that commanded the guard at our Lord's crucifixion.

A centurion was not always, as his name

would seem to imply, the captain over one hundred soldiers, because the strength, both of the legion and of the company, frequently varied. However, under the emperors the former generally consisted of about six thousand men. These seem to have been divided into ten cohorts under the command of so many tribunes; the cohort into three maniples, and the maniple into two companies. Each company had its own centurion; and the maniple was commanded by the senior of the two; so that the rank of a centurion appears in this respect to have borne some resemblance to that of a modern captain of cavalry: two of whom belonging to the same squadron, but each having charge of his own troop, yet in the field, and on duty, one is subordinate to the other. According to the rules of the service the centurions were selected not so much from the most enterprising, as from the steadiest, and most intelligent soldiers:¹ but this regulation was easily transgressed; and other recommendations, besides those of military experience,

¹ Polybius vi. 4.

frequently operated in the appointment. Indeed the arbitrary spirit, in which the affairs of the Romans were latterly conducted, makes it difficult to form a precise idea of the position of this officer. Sometimes we find him promoted from the ranks by the tribune;¹ at others commissioned at once by the emperors for his property, or family interest;² on one occasion the general of an army gives up the choice of their centurions altogether to the soldiers;³ on another, the most amiable of their princes summons them before the assembled legion;⁴ and as the tribunes and soldiers pronounce their merit, or ill-conduct, retains, or dismisses them from the service. On the other hand the centurions exercised extensive authority;⁵ and, when just and humane, acquired great influence over the men,⁶ who seem to have been keenly alive to the manner in which they were treated.⁷

¹ Cæsar, vi. 9.

² Dio. lli. 25.

³ Tacit. hist. iii. 49.

⁴ Tacit. Annal. i. 44.

⁵ Ibid i. 28.

⁶ Ibid i. 20.

⁷ See the first book of the annals of Tacitus, where a lively picture of this state of feeling, and of the manners of the Roman army, is drawn in the narrative of a mutiny, which broke out amongst three legions stationed in Pannonia. One centurion, who had made himself particularly obnoxious by his endeavours to

It is probable that the centurion, whose character we are about to consider, was on duty at Pilate's house during the night of our Lord's betrayal. He does not however appear to have been present at, nor cognizant of the insults, which were offered Him after his trial; and which, in so far as the military were concerned, seem to have been committed at first by a small number, and subsequently by the whole band,¹ whom their comrades collected together in the common hall. He was however, we may presume, a spectator at the trial; and when the moment came for leading Jesus forth to execution, he put himself at the head of his men, and conducted the party. There is every reason to revive the severe discipline of the early ages, is dragged from his carriage, loaded with knapsacks, and being driven into the front of the camp, is there insultingly asked whether he should like to have such a load to carry, and long marches to make? A second, who had acquired the nickname of 'Cedo alteram,' because, when he had broken one vine rod upon the back of a soldier, he used to cry out loudly for another, is killed; whilst a third, who by his conciliatory manners had gained the general good will, is summoned by the representative of the emperor to restore peace, and succeeds in doing so, although, if the legions were complete, there must have been nearly eighteen thousand men up in arms. The whole narrative is well worth the perusal of those, who consider the military system of the Romans to have been superior to our own.

¹ Matt. xxvii. 27.

son to believe that, if not a proselyte to the Mosaic doctrines, he had at least a knowledge of the true God; for, in addition to the evidence, which may be collected from his behaviour, we can hardly suppose that a sensible, enlightened man, as he evidently was, would fail to make himself acquainted with the religious tenets of a people so remarkable as the Jews, whose history and faith were so intimately connected with the interesting country, in which his duty had placed him.¹ As he was

¹ Although the ignorance, with which the best informed Romans perverted the history of one of their own provinces, is remarkable; nevertheless many traits both of the people, and of the country, highly calculated to awaken the curiosity of a stranger, were known to them. Of these it may be sufficient to notice the religious ceremonies, the absence of images, the worship of One, only God, the observance of the Sabbath, the magnificence and sacredness of the temple, the rite of circumcision, the awful barrenness of the dead sea, and the miracles, however misrepresented, which had distinguished the march of their forefathers through the wilderness by so many local particularities. If then we are right in considering the centurion an intellectual man, we must give him credit for wishing to ascertain by actual observation the authenticity of these details; and as he wandered from place to place, now tracing with military inquisitiveness the wondrous passage of Jordan, now gazing from the top of Sinai, or exploring the vale of Ajalon, he would gradually learn to confide in the traditions of the country, and to contemplate with veneration, a Being, of whom such wondrous things were related.

ordained to act a very important part at the approaching crucifixion, it may be humbly imagined that he was divinely led to observe with a watchful eye all that passed before the judgment-seat ; that he had heard the charge brought against the accused, and made himself acquainted with the particulars of the crime, for which he had been doomed to die. He had also seen the malignant enmity of the priests and rulers ; and had remarked the striking contrast between their virulent abuse, and the meek, uncomplaining deportment of the lowly sufferer. With a mind therefore deeply impressed by what he had witnessed, and fully informed upon all the circumstances of the case, he entered upon the march : and although at first enveloped in darkness, and incompetent to form a judgment upon so extraordinary an occurrence ; yet from his conduct on arriving at the Mount, it is clear, that he was profoundly interested, and anxious to come to a correct conclusion as to the character and pretensions of his prisoner.

In the meanwhile we cannot affirm that through his compassion the cross was laid upon

Simon,¹ in order that he might bear it after our Lord,² exhausted by the night of sorrow which he had just been passing; although, as the centurion had the command, and therefore nothing could be done without his authority, it is more than probable that this act of mercy was due to his consideration. Be that as it may, when the nailing of the sufferers was completed, he placed himself over against, or opposite Jesus;³ and, whilst the soldiers of the guard sat down, and with the indifference of common executioners watched their prisoner, or cast lots for his garments, he stood up, and in the attitude of deep solicitude watched also what would follow. No doubt that gracious Spirit, who alone can change the heart, was at this time busy within him; and whilst priests, and scribes, and Pharisees were heaping upon themselves the dreadful consequences of obstinate unbelief, was gradually preparing him to become a signal monument of converting mercy, and an important testimony to our Lord's divinity. He did not therefore mock the dying

¹ Matt. xxvii. 32.

² Luke xxiii. 26.

³ Mark xv. 39.

Saviour, as all around him did ; and, although we may grieve that he did not check the soldiers when guilty of that cruel conduct, yet it must be remembered that he was still in doubt ; that the elders and chief men among the Jews were setting the example ; and that many things were done through an overruling providence, in order that the Scriptures of the ancient prophets might be fulfilled.

It is a noble lesson that we learn from this Roman soldier, and one that may well fill us with deep humility. He was an officer of a victorious army, whose eagles had hovered in triumph over the extremes of the known world : he saw a malefactor of a conquered nation rejected, and condemned by his own countrymen ; and paying with his life for an imputed act of ambition, whose failure might, and did in the minds of most, awaken contempt rather than compassion.¹ He could know nothing of the motives, which had induced the Saviour to submit to this ignominious death ; or, if he did, he could not understand them ; and yet this

¹ Matt. xxvii. 42.

generous-minded man, led indeed by God, but yielding himself to the divine instruction, saw enough to convince him that it would be to his shame, and dishonour, should he refuse his sympathy to a person who under the veil of the deepest abasement was displaying such extraordinary excellence. He could not tell who Jesus was, nor was he persuaded of his divinity at once, and without examination; but he prepared himself for the conviction by a close and honest investigation, and took all the preliminary steps which the circumstances allowed. He did not think the study beneath him, neither did he allow his mind to be drawn away by imaginary occupations of duty, even on an occasion so full of trouble; but he best fulfilled that duty by a studious consideration of its incidents, and by the model of devout reflection which he has left behind him.

And who could be more capable of appreciating the wonders by which he was surrounded, than this open-hearted officer? His very profession, far from being a stumbling-block in his way, had rendered him peculiarly susceptible of the sort of virtues which he was called upon

to witness. He, who had beheld, or at least been accustomed to hear of men, that in the hour of danger had freely ventured life upon the field of battle, was the very person to view with admiration the calm, magnanimous conduct of the crucified Jesus. He had seen him refuse the sleepy potion,¹ that was offered in order to benumb his sufferings ;² had marked the patient endurance, that gave no utterance to its woes, but only breathed a prayer of pity for his murderers,³ or tender solicitude for his unhappy mother ;⁴ he had watched the calm composure, with which he listened to that bitter trial of a dying man, the taunts and calumnies of his survivors ; and he could not but feel his bosom prepossessed in favour of a person

¹ Mark xv. 23.

² This potion, as we find in St. Mark, was wine mingled with myrrh : and it is said to have been prepared by some benevolent females of Jerusalem, who, pitying the anguish of criminals condemned to be crucified, used to send it to them in order to benumb their feelings. It is not to be wondered at, that Jewish women should be shocked at the severity of this Roman punishment, so unlike the custom of their own country : and if humanity in the execution of malefactors be a criterion of the character of the law-giver, it will be well to compare the heathen with the Mosaic laws in this particular.

³ Luke xxiii. 34.

⁴ John xix. 26.

who could display in so eminent a degree the qualities which habit, education, and reflection had taught him to admire. What was Marcus Curtius,¹ who, amidst the plaudits of admiring Rome, had plunged into the yawning gulf ? What was the Leonidas of Grecian story, who, surrounded by his subjects, had boldly sold his life, whilst they were emulating his example ? Here was one, deserted at his hour of need ; abandoned by those, whom every tie of gratitude and veneration should have bound to run the risk of owning him ; reviled by his enemies, despaired of by his friends, yet maintaining amidst all his trials a royal dignity, and sustaining to the last the character, for which he had been doomed to die.

The centurion saw, and was astonished ; and if we may be permitted to withdraw our eyes from the chief personage in these extraordinary events, we also may be astonished at that soldier's piety. His unprejudiced mind, his thoughtful consideration, his sympathising pity may well awaken our attention, and lead us to enquire

¹ Livy, b. 7. c. 6.

how those emotions were so forcibly excited, and improved within him. The answer has been already given, that he was drawn by the spirit of God, and did not refuse to follow : he had the ground of an honest and good heart ; and those holy influences, finding a congenial soil, struck their roots deep, and grew with a rapid vegetation. All the amiable qualities, with which he had been endowed by nature, were freely yielded to this great Teacher : imperfect as his light was, he did not think it unsuitable to his profession to study a character so excellent as the one, which, through all its veil of ignominy and suffering, he had the faith and tenderness to appreciate ; and as Cæsar is related to have found leisure even in the midst of his campaigns for contemplating the starry heavens;¹ so this exemplary soldier took advantage of the unoccupied moments of duty to concentrate his meditations upon a subject as far above the aspirations of Cæsar, as the Creator is above his creatures. No allurements

¹ —— media inter prælia semper
Sideribus, coelique plagis, superisque vacavi.
LUCAN'S PHARSALIA.

drew away his eyes; no hurry unsettled his purpose; calm and collected he seems to have taken his position by the Cross with a heart open to conviction, and an understanding anxious to be enlightened.

Nor was he long without being repaid with such an assurance, as may be expected by all who with equal sincerity seek to know the truth. The sixth hour had arrived; three hours had the sufferers hanged upon the cross; three hours had Jesus borne pain and contempt, without the betrayal of an emotion unworthy of his holy nature; and so long, we may conceive, had the progress of conversion been adding testimony to testimony in the bosom of the centurion. But now fresh wonders were to engage his attention.¹ A supernatural gloom overspread the land; the sun was darkened; and the crucified Jesus, who had hitherto displayed the solicitous propriety of divine equanimity, was at length seen to yield to the horrors of his situation, and to cry, as if in the agonies of despair, "My God, my God, why hast thou

¹ Matt. xxvii. 45.

forsaken me." No doubt the centurion was deeply affected. Already softened, and depressed, we may now imagine him sinking beneath the emotions, which the drooping head, the afflicted countenance, and powerless frame, that hung suspended before him, could not but awaken. His growing faith perhaps was staggered ; and, had he been like many, he would have turned away from one, whose high pretensions seemed belied, and ending in contempt. But conviction was at hand. He, who has declared that his word " shall not return unto him void, but shall accomplish that which he pleases, and shall prosper in the thing whereunto he sent it,"¹ will assuredly do his part to complete each work of grace which he has begun. As the centurion continued to gaze, on a sudden a change came over the Redeemer's countenance: pain and anguish vanished from his brow; exulting joy was seen in every feature; and with a voice that should have made chief priests and elders tremble, he cried, " It is finished," then bowing his head, and saying,

¹ Isaiah lv. 11.

“ Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” he gave up the ghost.

And now a marvellous succession of events ensued. “ The earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened ; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” This last occurrence of course had no share in the centurion’s immediate conversion ; but the manner in which Jesus cried, and gave up the ghost, the earthquake, and the various extraordinary circumstances, which had marked that memorable day, so wrought upon his mind, that at length in all the fervour of complete conviction he exclaimed, “ Truly this was the Son of God ! ” “ Certainly this was a righteous man ! ”

Let us consider the consequences of this confession to Christianity, to himself, and to the world.

First, as it affected Christianity. When the centurion declared Jesus to be the Son of God,

¹ Matt. xxvii. 54.

he implied his perfect assent to all the dignities and privileges which belong to such a relationship. He acknowledges Jesus to be a righteous man ; a man incapable of pretending to more than he was strictly entitled to, and who had given undeniable proofs, that every thing which he had asserted respecting himself and his divine nature, was founded on reality. The centurion had approached the subject without prejudice. There was nothing in his circumstances to bias him one way or the other, certainly not to incline him to favour his prisoner ; he was in every sense an impartial witness ; he seemed determined to know the truth, and nothing but the truth ; and he would with equal readiness have condemned Jesus as an impostor, had he seen anything to lead to such a conclusion. He therefore closely scanned his word and actions ; he gave to every incident the consideration of a manly, sincere, and highly-interested curiosity ; he seems to have been throughout asking himself the question, ' Is this man the Son of God, or not ? ' and the result was, that having patiently waited throughout the day, he burst forth into that animated

declaration, which, as it were, wound up the Saviour's mortal history, and stamped, if we may venture so to express ourselves, the seal of a converted man on the other proofs of his divinity.

It cannot be doubted that the confession of an individual so conspicuous as the officer of the Roman Guard, to whose superintendence the crucifixion had been entrusted, must have made a deep impression on those who heard it. We read that "all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned."¹ But something more is related of such as were near the centurion. They did not confine their emotion to these silent tokens of sorrow; but either catching his enthusiasm, or else, like him, divinely inspired, they also exclaimed with him, "Truly this was the Son of God!"² The feelings of all were greatly moved, and, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they would reason and commune together upon the things which they had

¹ Luke xxiii. 48.

² Matt. xxvii. 54.

seen. But the words in which the centurion had been led to embody his convictions, would give consistency to the opinions of those who heard them; his affirmation of the one great and important truth would direct their reasonings: and seeing him so confirmed in his belief, they would, by the natural process of mental sympathy, be led to the same conclusion. As far therefore as one isolated fact could advance the faith, few of the incidents of that eventful day would operate more effectually upon the immediate interests of Christianity.

And that it was intended to influence the church throughout succeeding ages, is evident from the expressive manner in which it has pleased the Holy Spirit to dictate the occurrence. For who can read the centurion's declaration without corresponding emotions? Who does not feel himself arrested in the perusal, and constrained to dwell for awhile upon this striking passage of Scripture? Who does not perceive his faith confirmed, his mind comforted and refreshed by that brief but solemn avowal? Yes! when the centurion professed that "Truly Jesus was the Son of God," he

THE CENTURION AT THE CRUCIFIXION. 19

left a memorial which appeals to every heart, and a testimony to the truth of Christianity, which apathy cannot overlook, nor infidelity destroy.

Secondly, the centurion's was a saving faith. He did not make his acknowledgment in a careless manner, as if it was merely an assent to some doubtful proposition of little consequence; but he had combined it all along with sentiments of deep devotion. He seems to have considered the honour of God concerned in the solution, and to have connected in one train of thought the identity of Jesus with allegiance to his Maker. Thus, when he arrived at his conclusion, he felt that the Father himself was honoured in the triumph of the Son; and the feelings of piety to which he had already attained, gained strength and confirmation by an union, whose threads were thus intimately interwoven with, and consolidating one another. He is therefore said to have "glorified God: "¹ to have glorified him outwardly by his testimony, and inwardly with his

¹ Luke xxiii. 47.

heart; thus evincing his faith to be of such a nature as, we may presume, would fulfil in him the prayer that Jesus had poured forth for his executioners; and ultimately conduct him to those abodes of bliss, where all, who shall have witnessed the same good confession, will rejoice in the presence of that Saviour whom they have loved, for ever.

And as he was evidently a man of a devout mind, we cannot but conclude that the events which he witnessed on Calvary, would make too deep an impression on him to be easily effaced. We hear no more of him: but may we not without straining our imaginations, picture this centurion's conduct upon leaving that place of sorrow? We may conceive him spreading amongst his brother officers the fame of Him who had been crucified; his magnanimity in enduring pain; his meekness in forgiving injuries; his confident promise to the dying malefactor; and all the other wonders recorded by the evangelists. We may muse upon the pensive walks which he would take along the road to Golgotha, where memory would delight to recal the same endeared

reflections ; whilst the heavenly instructor, who had taught him first to appreciate them, would rejoice to draw him on to imitate the virtues which he admired, and to enquire further into the character of a person whom he had pronounced divine. He would not of course at once perceive his want of an atonement, nor understand the mysterious plan of man's redemption ; but he was in the way to discover, and, having discovered, to realize it. The more he dwelt upon the perfections of our Lord, the more he would be inclined to love him ; the more he loved him, the greater would be his anxiety to search out, and keep his commandments ; the more faithfully he kept the commandments, the more ready would the Father be to send him a comforter, who should make plain the way of salvation, and guide him into all truth.¹ It was said by a celebrated commander, that there ought to be an interval between the life of a soldier, and his death : but the life of such a soldier would be a constant preparation for that solemn event. It

¹ John xiv. 15.

would matter little to him, whether, like David, he survived the dangers of "a man of war;"¹ or, like Josiah, breathed his last upon the field of battle.² In either case he would have exercised himself to maintain a conscience void of offence, and might be able, with humble confidence, to resign his spirit into the hands of Him, whom he had endeavoured faithfully, though imperfectly, to serve.

Thirdly, as it regards the world, his was an exemplary faith; such a faith as, some years afterwards, drew forth the encomiums of the apostle Paul upon the noble Bereans;³ and

¹ 2 Kings xxiii. 29.

¹ It is comforting and encouraging to a soldier, to reflect upon the death of Josiah. He was a king unequalled in piety, eminent for every virtue, and devoted to the service of God. "Like unto him," it is said, "was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." 2 Kings xxiii. 25. To this excellent monarch, who through a long reign of thirty-one years, had perseveringly striven to reclaim his subjects from idolatry, it was promised that he should not see the evils about to be heaped upon them, but should be brought to his grave in peace. Happy, consoling words, and truly verified! He was brought to his capital, and buried in his own sepulchre; but it was on the field of battle that he breathed his last, and died in peace of mind, though in the tumult of war.

² Acts xvii. 11.

such as our Lord has himself commanded to all those, who would have a claim upon eternal life.¹ It was not the faith of one, who believes merely because others have believed before him ; but the deep conviction of candid, enlightened investigation ; a faith, to which the understanding and the heart had brought their united aid ; and whose possessor would be as ready now diligently to search the Scriptures, as he was to watch the progress of that memorable day. There would be the same frankness of disposition, to scrutinize what was fairly proposed to it ; the same willingness to be persuaded ; the same generosity, that would think shame to itself, did it permit all those pains and sorrows to be endured, without, at the least, a readiness to sympathize with, and to adore the sufferer. Let us then, all, whether of the same profession or not, take instruction from this devout soldier. There is nothing which the most worldly-minded can plead in extenuation of their neglect, that might not have operated with equal, if not greater, force

¹ John v. 39.

upon him. Are we tempted foolishly to consider religion as foreign to our calling, and to guide ourselves by the maxims of men, in preference to those of revelation ? A Roman, a dweller among Pagans, a disciple of poets and philosophers is before us. Do we overcharge our minds with worldly occupation, and devote no time to heaven ? The centurion might doubtless have pleaded as busy and engrossing a career, as any that we are likely to be called to. Let not then this Roman officer rise up in judgment with us, and condemn us. Let the young put off vanity ; the advanced in years indifference. Let not idle pleasure, nor selfish ambition, rob us of our noblest privileges, nor keep us chained to earth without an aspiration after worthier objects. Above all, let us contemplate the captain of our salvation : let it be our glory to be ranked among his soldiers, to behold in him a leader, who does not urge his followers into difficulties, from which he shrunk himself; but who, after being in all points assailed like as we are, finished his course by cheerfully standing foremost in the breach, and, unlike other conquerors, freely laying down his

life, that all who fight beneath his banners, might save theirs.

And as we delight to read the histories of those, whose characters engage our admiration, let us diligently search the book in which His is pourtrayed. We must approach it with humility, and peruse it with a teachable disposition : but if we are willing to transfer to its inspired pages the same interest, which is so readily yielded to the memorials of the great and good in secular history, there is One, who will enlighten our understandings, and assist us to discern a model as infallible for the graces, as for the virtues of a Christian soldier.

And here it may be well to consider the peculiar claims of the Bible upon military men ;—we say of military men, because, although adapted to every class of mankind, yet it seems to possess some attractions, especially suited to the members of that profession. From its first page to its last, military terms are used ; warlike transactions occupy a large part of its contents ; and not only the highest orders of created beings are represented in the form of warriors, but even the Saviour himself is revealed as a

monarch going forth to conquer. Thus when Moses describes the creation of the universe, in order to convey the most perfect idea of its symmetry, and of the unvarying rules by which its movements are conducted, he gives the finishing to his picture by comparing it to an army. When the angel of the Lord makes known the joyful tidings that a Saviour was born into the world, "suddenly there was with him a multitude of the heavenly host (or army) praising God." And when the second advent of that glorious Redeemer was shadowed forth to the apostle John, "His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns ; and the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean."¹ So again warlike transactions are recorded. From that memorable night, when "the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies,"² even to the day when his wrath arose against them, and "He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in

¹ Rev. xxix. 12.

² Exod. xii. 51.

the house of their sanctuary,"¹ we find a succession of campaigns and battles, some of them conducted with profound skill, adorned with deeds of the most heroic valour, and illustrated with the noblest rules of military conduct. Witness the miraculous indeed, but scientific march, which brought six hundred thousand Israelites in compact array, with all their women, cattle, and followers, from Goshen to the Red sea; witness the deeds of bravery recorded in the wars of David; and the reiterated commands to conduct themselves like men, so expressly given to the troops of Joshua. Military terms are also in constant use throughout the Bible. Not only were the prophets frequently constrained to express themselves in martial language; but the great Apostle of the New Testament is ever illustrating his subject by similar allusions. He bids us all to be valiant soldiers under our victorious captain:² he commands us to be clothed in perfect armour, to fight a good fight, and to imitate earthly soldiers, in abstaining from every pursuit which

¹ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17.

² Ephes. vi. 11.

rfare. He has an enemy, hourly felt, enlisting on his and propensities of a fallen e watch to assault, and, g diligence in the defence, As therefore the Israelites r to the promised land, so d upon to fight his to rthly soldier must learn ssion in order to conquer, or is warned that he can a thorough acquaintance n which he is summoned

iii. 2, 3.

study of its precepts lences from him. A than of worldly succ to bound our views and to soar no higher and space, where else regulation of our cond of success? To look to attentive in our calling making our own advanc sideration, are the comm we appeal to experience annexed to obedience ¹ ar other fulfilled; ² and wi

¹ Matt. v.
² What distinguished Godfrey of
England, and raised him by unani

can interfere with our duty to Him,¹ who has admitted us into his service.

Lastly. A military spirit pervades the whole system of evangelical religion. For how is our existence described? Is it as if the world were a scene of calm repose, wherein each one may live as he pleases, whilst time glides away, and heaven is secured without an effort?

On the contrary, the Christian is represented as in a continual warfare. He has an enemy, unseen indeed, but hourly felt, enlisting on his side the passions and propensities of a fallen nature; ever on the watch to assault, and, without corresponding diligence in the defence, sure to overcome. As therefore the Israelites had to fight their way to the promised land, so the believer is called upon to fight his to heaven; and as the earthly soldier must learn the rules of his profession in order to conquer, so the spiritual warrior is warned that he can be successful, only by a thorough acquaintance with that art of war, in which he is summoned to engage.

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 2, 3.

Thus forcibly does the Bible claim the attention of military men, addressing them in their own language, and identifying itself with the sentiments necessarily familiar to them. Honoured indeed is the profession of arms, and great the dignity with which the soldier is invested by such a selection ; but deep in proportion is the gratitude, and cheerful the study of its precepts, which that Bible challenges from him. And if we thought no more than of worldly success, if we were content to bound our views by this limited horizon, and to soar no higher than to things of time and space, where else should we apply for the regulation of our conduct with equal prospect of success ? To look to God, to be diligent and attentive in our calling in order to please him, making our own advancement a secondary consideration, are the commands of revelation ; and we appeal to experience whether the promises annexed to obedience ¹ are not in one way or the other fulfilled ; ² and whether even the most

¹ Matt. vi. 33.

² What distinguished Godfrey of Bouillon above the rest of his compeers, and raised him by unanimous consent to the throne of

ambitious do not acknowledge those periods of their career to be the most satisfactory, when they have cast away selfishness, and been intent on doing good.

This wisdom is not the fruit of nature, nor is it taught by the children of the world. It may be providentially learned under the rod of experience: but the true way to acquire it is by an application to the bible. That is the mirror in which the military man should accomplish himself. 'I have but one book,' said a dying poet, 'but it is the best;' and as it proved to Collins, so it will to every one who makes the trial. Deeply rooted in its principles, having recourse to it for guidance upon all occasions of doubt, and moulding his behaviour by its holy

Jerusalem as the most worthy of the champions of Christendom? Not his bravery, though amongst many brave he was conspicuous, but the pure and disinterested zeal with which he prosecuted the crusade, discarding all selfish ambition, and seeking above all things the honour of God!

Vide Goffredo che seacciar desia
Dalla santa città gli empi pagani;
E pien de fè, di zelo, ogni mortale
Gloria, imperio, tesor, mette in non cale,
La Gerusalemme liberata.

Canto primo, Stanza 8.

and benevolent precepts, he will learn to be indeed “without fear, and without reproach.” The affection of his comrades, the respect of his men, will flow to him with spontaneous attachment; and he will move through the world a beautiful spectacle of one, who sanctifies chivalry by religion, and adorns the manly virtues of an intrepid soldier with the pure and gentle innocence of a child of God.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHIEF CAPTAIN LYSIAS.

Acts xxi. 18 ; xxiii. 35.

The occasion of Lysias being mentioned—a large military force always kept at Jerusalem—The rank of a chief captain—The zeal and alacrity of Lysias—The desire of distinction a doubtful way of ensuring these qualities—false notions instilled into the young—Peace has its claims upon a soldier as well as war—the courtesy of Lysias—The army sometimes stigmatized as hardening the heart—The discretion of Lysias—The value of discretion—What it is and how to be acquired—The humility of Lysias—His disingenuous letter—His advantages compared with our own,

THE next occasion, upon which the Roman officers are incidentally mentioned, arose out of a great tumult that occurred at Jerusalem, when the life of the Apostle Paul was in imminent danger from the Jews. These people, having heard a report that, in the course of his ministry among the Gentiles, he had taught the

necessity of forsaking the ceremonial law, and being excited by some Asiatic Israelites who were sojourning amongst them, with the news that he was now in their city, rushed together to the temple, dragged him out of it, and were about to kill him.

In consequence of the disturbances which were incessantly threatening the peace of Jerusalem, it was the custom of the Roman governor to keep a large force in that capital. These troops, especially upon festivals, when an "innumerable multitude of the people came out of the country to worship,"¹ were stationed in a lofty castle, or fortress, adjoining to or overlooking the temple. They were at this time under the command of a chief captain, or tribune, named Claudius Lysias, whose character we are now about to consider; and although we shall not find that deep religious feeling, which distinguished the centurion, yet we shall meet with much to engage our attention, and to confirm what has been said of the exemplary qualities that adorned the Roman officers.

A tribune, or chief captain, was the com-

¹ Jewish War, 2. 1.

mander of a cohort, or thousand men. Originally selected, after many years' service, by the people, whose choice was confirmed by the consul or senate, he was in later times appointed by the emperors exclusively, and almost invariably from among the senators, or knights of the empire. This would seem to be a great falling off in military polity, since inexperienced men were suddenly placed in situations of responsibility;¹ and the avenues to promotion, that great incitement of zeal, and legitimate reward of merit, must have been barred against the inferior ranks. However, we may conclude Lysias to have been a man of family and fortune; not indeed born a Roman, but having purchased the right of citizenship with a large sum, and now holding an honourable post in the imperial armies.

¹ It is almost unnecessary to refer to the well-known incident in the life of Horace, who, being at an early age made a tribune by Brutus, proved at Philippi that, though an accomplished soldier may be a poet, yet the talents of the poet are not necessarily accompanied by the valour of the soldier. Yet the ingenuous confession of "parvula non bene relicta;" and the self-reproachful plaintiveness in which the anecdote is related, charm us into forgiveness of Horace's individual weakness, whilst they confirm our contempt of cowardice in general.

As the character of the Roman officers is the subject that we have proposed for our consideration, it would be foreign to such a plan to go through all the particulars of this portion of sacred history. We must therefore request each reader to peruse it in his own Bible; and we apprehend that the first trait to attract his notice in the conduct of Lysias will be the alacrity displayed by him in the execution of his duty. As commander of a thousand men, and governor of the citadel of Jerusalem, he was at least equal to a modern colonel, yet being placed in that authority to maintain order, no sooner does he hear of a tumult, than, instead of despatching a centurion to disperse the rioters, he hastens in person with a strong detachment to the scene of action.¹ Again, when Paul is brought down before the council, Lysias, not satisfied to receive at second hand a report of their proceedings, is present to see with his own eyes that justice is done;² and when it is determined to remove the apostle to Cesarea, he orders such an escort³ as shall put

¹ *Acts* xxi. 30. ² *Ibid.* xxii. 30. ³ *Ibid.* xxiii. 23.

the eclat of a fresh disturbance out of the question, and convince the Jews of the inutility of any attempt to force the object of their enmity out of his hands.

Such was the conduct of the chief captain; and when we reflect upon the arduous duties to which not only a soldier, but any public man may at a moment be summoned, we cannot but acknowledge it to be worthy of contemplation. For need we have recourse to history for instances, in which such persons have suddenly, and without warning, been placed in situations of responsibility; rather do not our own times furnish us with examples of individuals roused, like Lysias, from the tranquillity of peace, to quell dangerous and fiery outbreaks? Indeed, no one can tell how soon his turn may arrive for duties depending upon causes so fickle as popular excitement: and yet these duties may affect the honour of his country, and the lives of many a fellow-creature.

If then we generally act upon emergencies according to the maxims, which we have been in the habit of entertaining, in what way shall a man prepare himself for these sudden calls?

Shall he depend upon the desire of distinction, imitating those illustrious characters mentioned by the historian,¹ who declared that when they gazed upon the images of their ancestors, they felt their minds vehemently incited to virtue. Not that the marble, or the wax possessed those wonderful properties, but that the recollection of their actions kindled a flame in their bosoms, which nothing could allay but an equality of fame, and glory? Doubtless this is a powerful stimulant; but confined, we apprehend, to bosoms of a more ardent nature than warms the generality of men; and even with these a motive far too uncertain to be depended upon. How many do we see, starting upon this aspiring career, grow weary with protracted expectation, and with their hopes of success abandon perseverance also: how many want strength to resist the intoxication of praise, look back with complacency upon the past, and, unlike Cæsar, think all done, whilst almost every thing remains to be done: how many wander into crooked paths, break through the fences of truth and

¹ Sallust Jug. 4.

‘Nil actum credens, dum quid superasset agendum.’

honour, traduce their rivals, and sacrifice that fair name, without which they may dazzle for a time, but can never win the stamp of genuine, abiding value. Finally, how many grow excited in the race, and lose their presence of mind : fevered with the thirst of personal aggrandizement, they forfeit the control even of their animal spirits, and shew how easily the body can overcome the soul, if not fortified by sterling principles.

Since then we are liable to such deplorable weaknesses, there must be a more honourable motive, than the desire of emulating others, to guarantee a consistent fulfilment of duty in unexpected difficulties ; and so eager as we are by nature in our attachment to the world, it is only by giving the mind a new bias that we can hope to succeed. The active spirit must have an object, or weariness will undermine its vigour ; but, whilst the effort continues the same, the object in view must be changed. In a word, transient fame must cease to engross us, and the honour of God must take its place. When that has once got possession of a man, faithfulness in the discharge of the trust reposed in him is secured. Here there is no dis-

appointment ; the passions are balanced in a happy equilibrium ; wisdom to discern, and spirit to execute are its privileges ; and as the steamer moves onward to its haven, regardless of the winds which baffle ordinary vessels, so the believer plies his cheerful course, nor heeds the listless calms, and furious tempests, that wreck the frail, ill-found adventures of the worldly man.

And here it must be regretted that those, to whom the care of youth is entrusted, should think so little of administering antidotes against ideas which, like the fictions of romance, excite the imagination ; and, under the guise of virtue betray the young enthusiast into errors, to which the most ingenuous are the most susceptible, but for which life will often not be long enough to atone. When at the age of fifteen I read this beautiful sentiment applied to one like myself, entering upon the pursuit of honour,

‘ *Obstupuit, magno laudum percussus amore.*’¹

my heart responds with exultation to the thought ; and I feel as if no nobler motive can

¹ *Aeneid*, ix, 196.

be presented to my contemplation, in order to urge me to diligence, and generous emulation. But when at the age of fifty I recal the same ideas, and with the book in my hand cast a retrospective glance upon the wayward course, in which for thirty years I have wandered, ready as I still am to do homage to the heathen, who was capable of such sublime conceptions, yet sad experience has too well convinced me, that these bright imaginations are but intoxicating poisons, salutary perhaps when mingled in due proportion with better things, but, if taken unmixed, no better than exciting draughts which destroy the soundest constitution. What extravagant sallies have they led me to indulge; what unreal visions have they conjured up before me; what vanity and self-complacency at the smallest success: what despondency at each trifling disappointment; what dependency upon the caprice of others: what precious opportunities lost for every thing but repentance!

O Cromwell, Cromwell,
Had I but served my God with half the zeal
I served my king, He would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies;
KING HENRY VIII. a. 3. s. 2.

was the bitter conclusion of one, whose life had been celebrated for unceasing, laborious pursuits of worldly distinction ; and such, modified according to the circumstances of the individual, will be the reflections of all, who make the praise of men the motive of their zeal, rather than the praise of God.

Nor need there be less of general accomplishment in the man, who cherishes these devout sentiments ; than in him who merely runs the race of personal ambition. To adorn the doctrine of his Saviour in all things, to think of whatever is lovely, and of good report, is the Christian's privilege ; nor can we doubt that even the humblest talent may be turned to account by him who truly desires to honour his Maker. How magnificent is nature ? what grandeur clothes the mountains, what sublimity waves amidst the forest ! the majestic ocean rolls its mighty waters ; and the animating sun lights up the universe with its resplendent beams. Yet the elegant butterfly, that hovers among the flowers, redounds as much to the Creator's skill as all the wide-spread beauties, that fill the vast horizon. So it is with accom-

plishments, provided they are in keeping with the Christian's profession ; and as David, so renowned for military virtue, and eminent for poetry and music, ennobled all his talents by devoting them to Him who had bestowed them ; so may any man recommend his religion by adorning it with whatever graces complete a lovely character.¹

¹ With pleasure we draw an illustration of this truth from the history of two celebrated soldiers, who resembling each other in life by the cultivation of every virtue, both went to their rest upon the same bed of honour. Philip Sidney, killed at Zutphen ; and Lucius Carey, Viscount Falkland, shot at Newburg.

‘ Under the pressure of these reflections,’ says Lodge, alluding to some antecedent remarks in his brief but talented biographies, ‘ I sit down to write some account of the life of Sir Philip Sidney, whose character displays almost unvaried excellence ; whose splendour of talent, and purity of mind, were, if possible, exceeded by the simplicity and kindness of his heart ; whose short, but matchless career was closed by a death in which the highest military glory was even more than rivalled, not by those degrees of consolation usually derived from religion and patience, but by the piety of a saint, and the constancy of a stoic. . . . The character of his talents, the form of his education, the habits of his early society, and his own earnest inclination, combined to qualify him for a statesman of the first order. Disappointed in his favourite views, his activity probably sought relief in literary exercise, and hence we find more of the mind than of the heart, more judgment than fancy, in the productions of his pen. He fled to the muse, perhaps, rather for refuge than enjoyment, and courted her more in the spirit of a friend than of a lover ; but the warmth of his attachment was sufficient to produce a flame which was

And here to revert to soldiers, we would notice a prevailing error, that war is their element, and a campaign the only sphere in which they can be useful. Nothing proves the fallacy of human motives, nor the value of a converted heart, more than this idea, which, we fear, has betrayed many an energetic spirit into contempt, and like the wiles of Capua,

always bright and pure, and which, if it did not dazzle, at least never failed to enlighten. His works in general may be characterized as the choicest fruits of universal study, and unbounded recollection, selected by a mind which, while it possessed equal measures of the most powerful vigour, and the most refined delicacy, was ruled by the highest sentiments of religious, moral, and social duty:—*Lodge's Portraits of Illustrious Personages—Sir Philip Sidney.*

No less remarkable is the eulogium passed by the historian upon Lucius Carey. ‘In this unhappy battle, writes Lord Clarendon, was slain the Lord Viscount Falkland; a person of such prodigious parts of learning and knowledge, of that inimitable sweetness and delight in conversation, of so flowing and obliging a humanity and goodness to mankind, and of that primitive simplicity and integrity of life, that if there were no other brand upon this odious and accursed civil war, than that single loss, it must be most infamous, and execrable to all posterity. He was a great cherisher of wit, and fancy, and good parts in any man; and if he found them clouded with poverty or want, a most liberal and bountiful patron towards them, even above his fortune. He had a courage of the most clear and keen temper, and so far from fear, that he seemed not without some appetite of danger; and therefore upon any occasion of action, he always engaged his person in those troops, which he thought, by the forwardness of the com-

or the draughts of Circe, has transformed the young and vigorous enthusiast into the victim of useless apathy. The conclusion of war may be considered the soldier's turning point. Should he think that, when his sword is sheathed, there remains no more for him to do, the man is lost: but should he reflect that his, like every other profession, is a path through life determinable only by that event, which closes all things earthly, he will accommodate his views to the change of circumstance; and, whilst his spirits wing their flight in search of new engagements, he will find that the field of usefulness is always open, and that peace presents

manders, to be most like to be farthest engaged—and in all such encounters he had about him an extraordinary cheerfulness, without at all affecting the execution that usually attended them, in which he took no delight, but took pains to prevent it, where it was not, by resistance, made necessary: so that a man might think, he came into the field chiefly out of curiosity to see the face of danger, and charity to prevent the shedding of blood. Upon this eminent man many attempts were made to pervert him in his piety to the Church of England, and to reconcile him to that of Rome; which they prosecuted with the more confidence, because he declined no opportunity or occasion of conference with those of that religion, whether priests or laics; having diligently studied the controversies, and exactly read all, or the choicest of the Greek and Latin fathers, &c. &c.—*Clarendon's History of the Rebellion.* Vol. II. Book 7.

its duties, as well as the most active warfare. These Roman officers, whose characters we are now considering, all lived in a time of national repose; yet from the opinion, which we are led to form of them, there can scarcely be a doubt that their minds were always alive, and that they found some laudable occupation in every day's occurrence. "To go about doing good," is a motto that all may bear: and why should not the soldier wear it emblazoned on his heart, as the knights of old wore their devices on their shields? Then would he exclaim with the Roman emperor, "I have lost a day:" should conscience point to the declining sun, ere some benevolent deed had been performed, or some Christian grace called into action. And what abundant opportunities does a military life present, unknown to any other! Who has more leisure to improve the understanding than might be found in a garrison? Who else sees hundreds of his fellow-creatures congregated in a narrow barrack, and ready to pay submission to his every order? Who joins in daily intercourse with such a family of equals as meet in the mess-room? Who therefore has

such facilities of making his light shine before men, and of illustrating, by conversation and example, the beauty of a religious character.

Let not indeed any Christian imagine either place or time unfit for his exertions. If in a responsible situation, let him remember that *he* is especially bound to do nothing unbecoming his profession. Let no fascination tempt him to cherish other principles in lieu of those, with which he has been so graciously inspired. There may, as we have said, be minds of such fertility as to throw forth by nature many of the fruits, which he is required to produce by grace; but these are rare exceptions, which it would be folly in any one not equally endowed to hope to emulate. And even were it possible, that ordinary characters should hold a steady course through the troubled waters of an active life, by choosing the example of any man, however prosperous, for their guide; and moreover, were the race always to the swift, and the battle to the strong, which every day's experience confirms that it is not; yet even then we must sometimes reflect that the world passes away, and that years insensibly bring the

youngest to maturity, and that maturity is but the prelude to decay. At that hour, when the silver cord is on the point of being loosed, and the golden bowl of breaking, it will not be to the actions we have done, that we must look for comfort, but to the motives which inspired them. Paul in the prospect of martyrdom was able to exclaim, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith :" ¹ but the ground of his confidence was, that in the outset of his career, "forgetting those things which were behind, and reaching forth unto those things which were before, he had pressed towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." This gave him boldness in danger, address in difficulty; presence of mind in cases of emergency; and whilst it urged him to unceasing diligence in his worldly pursuits, it kept his energies in play, and enabled him always to do the right thing in its proper place.

The next feature in the chief captain's history, that merits attention, is the humane con-

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 7.

sideration displayed by himself and his officers. In the courtesy which he showed to Paul, permitting him first to address the people,¹ then to be at liberty in the castle, and to enjoy free intercourse with his relations and friends;² in his attendance at the trial to see that the apostle met with fair treatment;³ in the gentle and encouraging manner in which he took the young man aside to speak with him;⁴ in the care with which he provided for Paul's comfort on the journey to Cæsarea;⁵ and in the good-humoured readiness with which the centurions under him acquiesced in the wishes of their prisoner,⁶ we see evident marks of that kind disposition, which is so desirable an accompaniment to the sort of authority, that is frequently vested in military men. And if any one should object the intention of scourging as a proof of cruelty, it must be remembered that this mode of extorting confessions was sanctioned by the laws of the empire, and practised without scruple towards those who were not Romans.

As then we are commanded to abound in

¹ Acts xxi. 39.

⁴ Ibid. xxiii. 19.

² Ibid. xxiii. 16.

⁵ Ibid. xxiii. 24.

³ Ibid. xxiii. 10.

⁶ Ibid. xxiii. 18.

gentleness and compassion, it is worth enquiring what caused this superiority of Lysias over the Jewish council; and why he may be considered nearer to the kingdom of heaven than men who enjoyed daily opportunities of studying the sacred Scriptures. It could not have been indifference in the Roman, and religious enthusiasm in the others, which led them to act so differently, because the priests and elders were ready not only to tear Paul¹ in pieces during the excitement of controversy,² but also to encourage such a scheme of premeditated murder, as proved them to have no sense of religion at all. It was the contrast between selfishness and benevolence. This excellent principle had been banished from, or never inhabited the bosoms of the Jews, but flourished as a plant of native growth in the heart of Lysias. On the contrary, ambition, and the interests of their order monopolized *their* thoughts. Their jealous minds could not bear that any should be admitted to privileges, which they wished to keep exclusively their own; nor could their

¹ Acts xxiii. 10.

² Ibid. xxiii. 20.

contracted views discover any way of doing so, but by a stupid and barbarous fanaticism. How different was the temper of Lysias. He, like the centurion, had been endowed with a generous disposition. The kindly affections which flowed spontaneously from his bosom, had neither been choked by prejudice, nor dried up by pride; but with a pure and lively current circulating through his bosom, suggested the conduct that ought to be pursued, and found a ready acquiescence. That he was secretly influenced to execute the intentions of God towards his chosen apostle, may be humbly presumed; yet, as far as man is a free agent, he seems to have gladly obeyed the divine impulse, and to have surrendered the best qualities of his nature, as ready instruments in furtherance of designs so congenial to his disposition.

There is a pleasure in contemplating such a character, because the army has been sometimes stigmatised as a profession necessarily hardening the heart, and vitiating the affections. Thus the poet Cowper, after expatiating upon the evils which had been heaped upon his country, especially by "universal soldiership," brings

the sad catalogue to a conclusion with this comprehensive censure,

Arms, through the vanity and brainless rage
Of those that bear them, in whatever cause,
Seem most at variance with all moral good,
And incompatible with serious thought.¹

Thus again the historian, in alluding to the centurion, whose history we shall by and by consider, describes the messengers whom he sent to Peter: ‘Peter lodged the three men that night, two of them were household servants, and the third—rare character! a devout soldier.’²

Thus also a later writer, who has ventured to take upon himself the office of judge, and to declare what persons shall, at the great day of retribution, be welcomed to the abodes of bliss, and who condemned to misery, is pleased to qualify his sentence upon soldiers in general by this merciful exception.

‘Nor yet did all that fell in battle rise,
That day to wailing; here and there were seen
The patriot bands that from his guilty throne
The despot tore, unshackled nations.
—Not undistinguished these, though few,
That morn, arose with joy and melody.’³

¹ Task. Book IV. ² Milner’s Hist. Church, vol. I. c. 5.

³ Pollock, Course of Time, Book VII.

We know not what grounds these eminent men may have discovered for such opinions ; but we would fain hope that there is not, of necessity, more foundation for them in our days, than in those of Lysias : that the same virtues may adorn the military profession, as are to be found in the most peaceful ; and that where they are deficient, it is the fault of the individual, not of the employment. Not that we would set up the army as free from danger, and incapable of hardening the heart, for both in war and in peace it has its own temptations : and he is no friend to the young who would represent it otherwise. But it is to the weak mind, to the mind easily led away, or incapable of forming a rational plan of conduct, that these dangers are especially formidable ; whilst like plants which distil poison or medicine according to their treatment, they may be converted into bright opportunities of good by the wise and prudent.

There was some sage advice once given to soldiers not very long before the days of Lysias. It is true, the words seem to have been principally addressed to the private men ; and political

circumstances may have made them not so strictly applicable to the troops of an equal government, as to those who were required to execute the decrees of despotic princes. Still its spirit—so beautiful is the universality of the Bible—remains the same; and when John enjoined the Roman legionaries to “do violence to no man, neither to accuse any falsely, and to be content with their wages ;”¹ perhaps he left a system of discipline which, if honestly carried through, would go far to neutralize the evils, and establish the character of any army. For may we not still rank the leading temptations of a mili-

¹ Luke iii. 14. Not very long before the time when John delivered this advice, two serious mutinies had broken out in the Roman armies. On the Danube and on the Rhine, the legions had risen against their leaders, almost simultaneously, and in both instances putting forth the same grievances, unwarranted length of service, severity of discipline, and scantiness of pay. In one instance, when the sedition had been appeased, the general commanding took an extraordinary mode of satisfying the soldiery: for summoning the centurions to the front of the legion, he made a public enquiry into their character; and if the tribunes, and the men approved, he retained them in their rank; but if the general voice accused them of misconduct, he dismissed them from the service.—Tacitus Ann. i. 44. To such events as this, as well as to the custom of employing soldiers in collecting taxes, it is probable that the Baptist alluded, for in this latter service many cruelties were committed to force the refractory to pay.—Josephus’ Antiquities, b. 12. c. 4.

aptist's caution, and, whilst offering none, follow gentleness to all, few, who have witnessed its opportunity how elevating and how lovely might be. So again, for a man with what his country pays him, these are comprised in such a useful œconomy; honourable quiet obedience; thoughtful application are the privileges of a mind, unless inactivity, but having its end by humility, and its desires aughtment: and were all these aggregate of a profession, we whether it would be a school of good report.

It seems, in the third place,

tary career, indifference to the sufferings of others in war ; and a listless dissatisfaction with its emoluments in time of peace ? We know that deeds of bloodshed must be done ; and that so long as the battle lasts, duty bids the soldier strive for victory : but when the day is won, and far more when he is settled in some quiet station, then if he should remember the Baptist's caution, and, whilst offering violence to none, follow gentleness to all, few, but those who have witnessed its opportunities, can tell how elevating and how lovely such a life might be. So again, for a man to be content with what his country pays him, how many virtues are comprised in such a disposition. Cheerful oeconomy ; honourable independence ; quiet obedience ; thoughtful application ; these are the privileges of a mind, incapable of lifeless inactivity, but having its thoughts controlled by humility, and its desires regulated by contentment : and were all these spread over the aggregate of a profession, we need scarcely ask whether it would be a school of morals, and of good report.

The virtue, which seems, in the third place,

to have been particularly displayed by Lysias, is discretion; a quality eminently useful in public life, and mentioned in terms of high commendation in scripture. First at the council: we have already seen him attending in person in order to superintend their proceedings; we are now to contemplate him in the violent scenes that ensued, and in the peril by which the apostle's life was threatened. There can be no doubt that he might with much reason have taken severe measures against the Jewish rulers. Here were the leading men of a city under his command, who ought to have set an example of moderation, and to have entered upon the trial of their prisoner with the decency that a court of justice demands, tumultuously breaking off into a dispute upon some question affecting their own peculiar views, and in the fury of passion menacing with death the man, who had been brought before them for an impartial hearing. Lysias therefore might fairly have broken up an assembly, which displayed such a want of decorum, and have represented their conduct in its proper colours to the governor. But he had been stationed in

Jerusalem to preserve tranquillity ; and whilst obliged to rescue Paul by force out of their hands, he was unwilling to take steps which might create avoidable disagreement ; well knowing that it is easier to prevent evil, than to remedy it ; and that many things must be passed over by those in authority, if they would have the course of affairs run smoothly. Neither therefore would he give offence by setting the accused person, although a Roman, at large, nor by using his power to coerce their future measures for proceeding according to law : but finding that they were too excited to be trusted as judges, he promptly took the prisoner under his own management ; nor do we see how he could have acted more judiciously, or have better tempered justice with conciliation.

Secondly, the chief captain's discretion was conspicuous in the manner, with which he received, and acted upon the information given him by the apostle's nephew. Shocked as he must have felt at such an instance of treachery, it required no small degree of self-possession to discern at once the steps that ought to be

taken. At first, it is not improbable he may have been tempted to give loose to his indignation ; and openly to accuse the chief priests, and elders of their infamous designs : but then whom should he select out of the vast numbers that had joined the conspiracy ; and what proof had he of their guilt except the evidence of one young man, whose relationship to Paul might well throw suspicion upon his veracity ? He would therefore only expose himself by making charges which he could not substantiate, give the council an advantage over him, and weaken, if not lose altogether his power to save Paul. By the time therefore that the young man had concluded his message, Lysias seems to have made up his mind ; and letting his informer go away, so that neither he might be in danger for having conveyed the intelligence, nor any suspicions be awakened by his appearance in the castle, he resolved at once to prevent all further mischief by referring the matter to the Roman governor.

And this brings us to a third instance of the prudence which he manifested throughout ; for having summoned two centurions, and deter-

mining to leave nothing to chance, he commanded them to prepare such an escort as should baffle any attempt which the Jews might make to recover their victim; and, in order still further to ensure success, he directed that the party should leave Jerusalem at an early hour of the night, and thus be out of the reach of harm before the morning.

Such was the conduct of Lysias, and it exhibits traits, which, whether displayed upon a large scale, or confined to the simplest operations, are always to be considered proofs of a superior character. We are therefore naturally led to desire that we may in the hour of trial behave with equal wisdom; and it becomes an object of deep interest to discern by what means we shall best lay the foundation of so valuable a frame of mind.

Discretion is the faculty of choosing the right path through the varied events of life. As different men are born with different dispositions, it may, at first, appear that self-knowledge is the great desideratum towards the attainment of this excellent endowment: nor indeed without it can we well apply to our fail-

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nce may have been pleased to endow us.
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ce; and as much of the business of life may
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les applicable to every character, which we
ve unerring authority to consider as the sure
indation of this great acquirement. "When
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est of men, "and knowledge is pleasant
to thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee,
derstanding shall keep thee."¹ Here then
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¹ Prov. ii. 10.

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may require. It is indeed the want, or the cultivation of these aspirations, that constitutes the great distinction observable in different men; and as, when we hear of any one conducting himself prudently in circumstances of difficulty, we give him credit for having trained his mind by habitual reflection; so when we behold one who fails, we cannot help suspecting that he may have carelessly wasted the time, which ought to have been devoted to this salutary discipline.

But although 'studies serve for delight, for ornament and for ability,' yet if we would walk with discretion, we must not stop here, but interpret wisdom in the full sense that Solomon intended. We must beware of every thing, which can cloud the understanding, or ruffle the temper; we must command our passions, and regulate our desires: we must establish such a control over our feelings as not to be flurried by sudden excitement, nor betrayed into imprudence by bursts of anger. We must beware of praise, and of prosperity. "He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to

him."¹ Praise makes the weak man vain, but the wise man watchful; and perhaps one of the most remarkable characteristics of the greatest person of modern times, is the equanimity, with which he has listened to eulogiums, which would have upset ordinary minds. On the other hand, we must be contented in adversity. The world make no allowance for indiscretions because committed in the fretfulness of disappointment. Further, we must maintain our independence. Had Lysias suffered himself to become in any way indebted to the Jewish rulers, he would have made but a weak attempt to enforce his authority among them. Finally we must pray for a renewed heart, and a sound mind. That light of the understanding, which is peculiarly the gift of grace, imparts a perception as clear, as it is new, of every object. The candle of the breast, hitherto glimmering with the uncertain dimness of human prudence, is now illuminated with the radiance of truth; and it is observable that those men of the world, who are most remarkable for discretion, are always seen to regulate their conduct by the maxims, which

¹ Prov. xxvii. 14.

the Christian finds in the pages of revelation. They may word them in their own phraseology, and lay claim to them as their own wisdom ; they may even wear them as a mask, without any regard for them beyond their temporary convenience ; but they are in reality divine, and can they be less efficacious if accompanied by the assistance of Him, from whom they originally emanated ?

We have a striking instance of this virtue in the early career of David. No man perhaps was ever placed, at his entrance into life, in circumstances of greater difficulty. Bred up from infancy to the care of his father's flocks, he had apparently passed the chief part of his youth in wandering among the hills of Judæa, solacing his lonely hours with his harp or his pipe, or scanning with curious and admiring eye

‘ Whate'er of beautiful or new,
Sublime or dreadful, in earth, sea, or sky,
By chance, or search, was offered to his view.’

From these innocent occupations he was summoned by his father, to go and inquire after the welfare of his brethren, who, with the army of Israel, were warring under the command of

Saul, against the Philistines. On his arrival at the camp he found the whole host drawn up in order of battle, but trembling at the appearance of a gigantic champion, who for days had challenged his enemies to produce a man to fight with him, and for whose head the king had in vain offered his daughter, and honors, and riches in abundance. To slay this mighty warrior was therefore at once to step into the most conspicuous station of the army, and the country; and to encounter all those trials to which sudden wealth, rank, and popularity are exposed. David undertook the task; in the sight of the contending hosts he defeated the giant, and from a humble keeper of sheep, became in a day the adopted son-in-law of his sovereign, bosom friend to the heir apparent, commander in chief of the army, the idol of his countrymen and countrywomen, and the theme of such universal admiration, as to excite the deadly jealousy even of the monarch, for whom he had risqued his life. What difficulties must this extraordinary transition have presented to his youthful mind! What hourly discretion was necessary to maintain the pre-eminence acquir-

ed in this unusual manner! what self-control, what knowledge of mankind, what caution against giving offence, what conciliating manners, what readiness, and prudence in all things! And so it is intimated by the sacred historian, who, in relating the consequences of his victory, three times repeats, as if to attract our especial attention, and to account for his extraordinary success, that "David behaved himself wisely."¹ From whence then was this wisdom derived? what opportunities had he enjoyed for forming his character, and for preparing himself to step thus at once upon the arena of public life? Scarcely any! He had been for a short time armour-bearer to the king, and had given promise of that superiority of mind, for which he was afterwards eminent; but the historian gives the true solution of the difficulty in the expressive words, "The Lord was with him." "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him."² From the time when he was first selected as the object of divine favour, when "Samuel took the horn of oil, and anoint-

¹ 1 Samuel xviii. 5.

² Ibid. xviii. 4.

ed him in the midst of his brethren, from that time his heart had been enlightened by the illumination of a converting Spirit; and, happy David! he had welcomed the holy dispositions thus awakened within him. He walked therefore wisely; he did not thrust himself upon the great prospects which the prophet had opened before him; but returning to his pastoral occupations, he awaited God's time to call him from his obscurity. Thus he and his God went hand in hand; and as he in the meanwhile made the divine law his daily study, meditating upon its precepts, and engraving them on his heart; so, when he found himself thrown amidst the temptations of a busy world, his footsteps slipped not. In every difficulty his path was clear; a holy freedom animated his actions, and a reverential awe restrained them. The influence which he acquired over other men, was gracious, not constrained; and as he gratefully exclaims, so it was; "I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation."¹ But we return to Lysias.

¹ Psalm cxix. 99.

It is difficult from this one transaction to elicit all the particulars of the chief captain's character; but there is one which seems so essential to a prudent conduct, that we are inclined to attribute much of his discretion to it. The virtue, to which we allude, is humility, by some considered incompatible with worldly success, but which revelation declares to be its surest foundation. "Before honour is humility, and a haughty spirit before a fall."¹ And if we contemplate the men most distinguished for their good conduct, we shall find them all endowed with a greater or less degree of this excellent quality. Few men ever occupied stations of more importance, whether as a commander, a statesman, or a lawgiver, than Moses; yet it is recorded of him, that "he was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." Humility was evidently at the root of the wisdom, which we have noticed in David. When the servants of Saul communed with him, insinuating that he should marry their master's daughter, instead of grasp-

¹ Prov. xv. 33; xvi. 18.

ing at the honour thus put within his reach, his answer was, “ Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king’s son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?” If then there be but a presumption that Lysias possessed this valuable ornament, let us thankfully avail ourselves of any opportunity that brings it under our notice; and although it may be foreign to our nature, and difficult of acquirement, yet, if well understood, and practised upon Christian principles, it will be found our surest safe-guard, and best recommendation.

Thus far have we considered Lysias as a person worthy of imitation. Justice now requires that we should exhibit him in another point of view; and it is with regret that we find a man, capable of so many estimable actions, allowing a paltry regard to his own interests, or a contemptible fear of his fellow-creatures, to cast a shade over his otherwise bright character. Having determined to send Paul for further examination to Felix, and having taken the precautions already mentioned to ensure his

¹ 1 Samuel xviii. 23.

safety, he wrote a letter, or dispatch, to the governor, detailing the circumstances: and although it may be remarked, by the way, that this document has ever been considered, in point of composition, an admirable specimen of what letters upon business ought to be; yet, in order to screen himself from the blame of having bound a Roman, Lysias condescended to make a statement, which was not true. He wrote word that having understood that the person, whom the Jews were maltreating, was a Roman, therefore he hastened with his soldiers, and rescued him; whereas it is clear that the fact did not come to his knowledge, till Paul revealed it as they were binding him. It is well for the chief captain's fame that his conduct had been humane previous to his possessing this information; otherwise we should be obliged to attribute all the courtesy that we have been admiring, not to a conscientious disposition, but to a desire of consulting his own interests. And after all, what benefit could he expect from stating an untruth, which would not have been reaped just as surely by sincerity? Had Lysias written that, being on the point of scourging

Paul, but discovering him to be a Roman citizen, he had instantly desisted—would not Felix have been equally satisfied? or is it probable that the governor would remember for a day what the other was so anxious to make a merit of? Little did Lysias imagine that this whole transaction would be transmitted to future ages, to be descanted upon so long as the world should last; or he never would have permitted his name to descend sullied by a meanness, for which, even in its committal, he must have despised himself.

And now having examined the features, which appear most prominent in the deportment of the chief captain, it remains for us to inquire who Lysias was, and what privileges he had been favoured with, that can compete with those which we enjoy. Lysias was a heathen, a Roman, and a soldier: he had therefore the religion of his gods, the wisdom of his nation, and the discipline of his profession to guide him. It was indeed a high advantage to be enrolled among the citizens of a country so great and enlightened as Rome, where every talent, of which our nature is susceptible, seems

to have been cultivated successfully, and the noblest sentiments, of which unaided man is capable, to have adorned its philosophy. To have studied Virgil, Cicero, Sallust, and other authors, with whom a person in the circumstances of Lysias may be supposed to have been familiar, was eminently calculated to elevate the mind, and to humanize the manners.

Again, debased as the religion of a heathen was, yet let it be granted that conscience and reason both taught that virtue was desirable, and vice detestable. Let us pass over what the gods were in their own conduct, and concede that justice, and mercy, and magnanimity were the qualities required in their worshippers; and that Tartarus and Elysium were the punishment and reward of the wicked and the good.

To a people so warlike as the Romans, every thing connected with that department was naturally of the first importance; and the rules laid down for their guidance in this respect were doubtless highly improving to those immediately affected by them. To live without injury at peace was propounded as the legiti-

mate object of war:¹ an enemy, who surrendered, was to be spared, even though the battering ram should have begun to break his walls; a conquered foe, received into alliance, was treated and protected as a portion of the empire. Enthusiasm was coupled with discipline; the oath taken by a soldier on his admission to the ranks was solemnly renewed every year; the eagles were regarded as objects of adoration;² and the privates were taught to consider themselves advanced in respectability by being enrolled under them. Implicit obedience was expected and enforced; rewards animated the deserving; but punishment never slept when a crime had been committed. Quietness and decency, good order and security prevailed in their cantonments; and such was their pre-

¹ ‘These victories make me melancholy’ was the frequent reply of one of England’s most gallant generals when congratulated on his successes: for he considered the practice of warfare as a solemn duty, and regarded victory of no value but as it tended to promote the interests and the repose of society.’—*Lodge’s Portraits of illustrious personages, Sir Ralph Abercrombie.*

² ‘During one of the above mentioned mutinies, Minucius Plancus, ambassador from the senate to the revolted forces, fearing assassination from the soldiers, rushed into the camp of the first legion; and embracing the standards, and eagle; committed his life to the sanctity of those revered objects.’—*Tacitus, Ann. i. 39.*

eminence in all these respects, that an historian of a conquered nation, cotemporary with Lysias, bestows upon them an interesting eulogium, in order, as he says, ' to comfort those who had been vanquished by them, and to deter others from attempting innovations under their government;'¹ so deeply impressed was he with the superiority of their military institutions.

These were undoubtedly great advantages, and it may be concluded, that the minds of those who were favoured with them, would be both strengthened and refined; strengthened by the habitual control imposed upon irregularities, and refined by the honourable sentiments of their talented moralists. Yet when we compare the state of the world in those days with the light that has since been poured upon it, can we for a moment pretend to balance the opportunities of Lysias and his countrymen, against those which we enjoy? Begin where we will, how forcibly does the reverse seize upon our convictions. If we take the discipline of the Roman army, and suppose, though every

¹ Josephus iii. 5.

thing leads us to doubt it, that they were at all superior in this respect to ourselves; yet to what men was this obedience, the soul of discipline, to be rendered? With Nero on the throne, and Felix governor of the province, an officer like Lysias, instead of taking pride in the allegiance which he was compelled to pay them, must have revolted at it. That fidelity of the heart, that cheerful homage which the soldiers of a well-conditioned government gladly yield to a gracious sovereign, or an exemplary commander, can here have had no existence. The character of the emperor, and of his representative, could awaken nothing but disgust; and the sentiments of honour with which Rome endeavoured to animate her armies, must have received daily and deadly wounds from those whose lives were a ceaseless degradation of the servants of their government. Thus neutralized were the advantages of Roman discipline in the days of Lysias: thus did hindrances obstruct his way, which can never rise beyond a certain height in ours. We may have a weak sovereign, or incapable governors; but, thank God, we can never have a Nero, or a Felix.

But if the condition of our soldiers is preferable to that of the Roman, what shall be said of the privileges common to us all, as compared with the unenlightened heathens? Can the brightest splendour of the noon-day sun, and the feeble glimmering of a winter morning, give even a faint idea of the Christian's light, and the Pagan's darkness? Let it be granted that Lysias had received a liberal education, that he was skilled in the literature of Greece and Rome; nay, that he had acquired some knowledge of the law of Moses during his sojourn in Judæa, or had even become acquainted with the principles of the religion of Jesus, yet, unless converted to the truth as it is in him, of which we have no intimation, what a complication of error would he have to unravel, of which we can scarcely form an idea. Prone as we are to adhere to early habit, the impressions of childhood, which are all in our favour, would have to be wholly obliterated in him. We are accustomed to revere the name of Christianity, and, if we do not practise its precepts, at least to entertain no doubt of its unspeakable superiority over all other religions. But to arrive

at such a conclusion, Lysias would have to penetrate with the eye of faith¹ through all the ignominy heaped upon its early preachers ; to reject the shewy superstitions of his own mythology, and to prefer the humbling tenets of a set of men, whom all the world, Jews and Romans, seemed combined to afflict, as beings scarcely fit to live.² Expiring paganism would hold with a convulsive grasp her ancient votary. The law of Moses, corrupted by the traditions, and disgraced by the conduct of the scribes and pharisees, would shock an indifferent observer ; whilst instead of that gospel which we know to be divine, but which in his days had only partly

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 9.

² Although the infamous persecution of the Christians by Nero did not take place till two years after Saint Paul's voyage to Rome, yet the seeds of it had long been sown, in the hatred and contempt entertained against them. After detailing the cruelties which they were made to suffer ; how they were dressed in the skins of wild beasts, and exposed to be torn to pieces by dogs ; how some were crucified, and others, smeared over with combustible matter, were used for torches to give light by night ; the historian concludes by saying that they were pitied, not because they did not deserve the most exemplary punishment, but because they seemed by the manner of their death to have been sacrificed to gratify a barbarous tyrant, rather than to benefit the public.—*Tacitus, Ann. xv. 44.*

been transcribed, far less multiplied and translated, so as to be within the reach of every one; he would have to compare system with system, his evil inclinations tempting him all the while to adopt that, in which whatever bad propensity was most dear to him, might be most easily indulged. The purest precepts of Christianity would seem folly in his eyes; and the strongest incentive to their practice, gratitude to a crucified Saviour, would be incomprehensible to him.

Such is a very imperfect sketch of the blessings that we enjoy, but which were denied to the Roman; and we know that from those, to whom much has been given, much will be required. If a heathen, acting up to the light of his day, was just, and merciful, diligent in the discharge of his duty, and humane to those in his power, what shall be said of the professing Christian, who is in all, or in any of these things, the reverse? Does he not cast a reproach upon his religion, as if the commands of philosophy were more attractive than those of revelation? Does he not act an ungrateful part; and has he any right to expect that his journey

through the world will be attended with a blessing?

Would then that I had a fire within me to convince those, who are entering upon the career of life, of the inestimable advantage of taking Religion for their guide. If they wish to be ornaments to their age, if they wish their minds to be enriched with whatsoever things are pure and lovely; if to succeed in life, and to be honoured in death; by her they will be assured of the best part of their desires, and have the most reasonable prospect of the remainder.

CHAPTER III.

THE CENTURION JULIUS.

Acts xxvii. 1, to xxviii. 13.

Appointed to take charge of the Apostle Paul from Cæsarea to Rome—The party embark, and sail—Julius courteously entreats Paul—the power of an officer at sea—prisoners of war—violent tempest—Paul encourages the crew, and passengers—arrival off an unknown coast—Paul interferes to prevent the sailors from escaping—manly behaviour of Julius—his appreciation and care of the Apostle—They are cast upon the island of Malta—Discipline of the party—Julius greatly indebted to Paul—In what respect he may be proposed as an example—the faith of Julius—His resolution and generosity—Study of the Bible again recommended to military men—All are in the eyes of heaven centurions—the history of Julius illustrative of Christian experience.

PAUL remained two years at Cæsarea, at the expiration of which time Felix was recalled from his government, and Festus appointed in his place. Although so long a period had elapsed since the removal of the apostle from

Jerusalem, yet the high priest and chief men of the Jews, still cherishing their former hatred, took advantage of a visit, which the new governor paid to their city, to request that he would send for Paul, intending, as before, to lay wait on the road, and to put him to death. Providence, however, a second time baffled their schemes; and Festus determined to detain Paul where he was until his own return to Cæsarea, when he would hear him and his accusers face to face. In the course of the examination Paul appealed unto Caesar; ¹ and Festus and Agrippa acceding to his demand, he was not long afterwards delivered to a centurion to be escorted, with other prisoners, to Italy. This is the third incidental mention of a Roman officer. His name was Julius, and he belonged to Augustus's band, or the emperor's own regiment, nor must it be forgotten, if we would do justice to his character, that that emperor was Nero, and that probably this corps had been

¹ It is worthy of notice that the Cæsar, to whom our Lord commanded tribute to be rendered, was Tiberius: he to whom Paul appealed, Nero: and the king, whom Peter commanded the Christians to honour, Agrippa: all three heathens, and two of them *amidst the vilest of mankind.*

kept about the person of that iniquitous prince. In such a court little good could he learned; and if we find in Julius the traits of an estimable man, it will shew that virtue does not necessarily wither even in the most uncongenial atmosphere.

The party, having embarked, and sailed, on the next day touched at Sidon; and the first anecdote related of this interesting voyage is, that "Julius entreated Paul courteously." It is very delightful, and so it must have been to the historian, thus to proceed from individual to individual, and to find each behaving in the same spirit, and fulfilling to the best of his ability the Christian duty of courtesy. Every one has heard of the authority which a naval officer in modern days may exercise over those who sail with him; and to judge from the events of this narrative, at least an equal discretion was vested in the Roman centurion; yet we see him using it, not to annoy, but honourably to contribute to the comfort of those entrusted to his charge. We may suppose that Paul's character and conversation had much influence in producing this good effect; and may pre-

sume that God gave him favour in the eyes of the Roman: still we must allow the centurion credit for his susceptibility to merit, and acknowledge the deference which he paid to it, to be a fine example of the sort of treatment which is due to all whom the event of duty or of war may commit to our custody.

Here then we at once learn two valuable lessons; first, to acknowledge and honour merit under any circumstances: secondly, to treat our prisoners with humanity. This applies equally to all cases; for the rule of doing to others as we would have them do to us, puts all minor considerations as to the quality of the prisoner on a level. And it is the more necessary to dwell for a moment upon this subject, because it may be feared that England, with all her individual benevolence, has been justly proverbial for her carelessness in this respect; insomuch that when her great rival strove to rekindle the flame of hostility against her in the bosom of his soldiers, he drew his most powerful appeal from the sad and comfortless captivity, which they had suffered in our depôts.¹ We

¹ See Napoleon's proclamation to his soldiers three days before

stop not to shew the injustice of condemning brave men to misery because they did their duty; but we ask whether great responsibility does not attach to us as a nation; and whether prisons of war, like all other prisons, ought not to be reckoned important instruments of good. If the welfare, spiritual as well as temporal, of their inmates were attended to, who can calculate the benefits, that might be diffused at their liberation, and dispersion over the world: and must not guilt be attributed to ourselves, if, through a want of ordinary sympathy, we send them forth more depraved than when they entered, as well as irritated by treatment, which they have not deserved?

During the voyage, which was undertaken late in the year, there arose a violent tempest: and in the course of it we shall have occasion to notice this centurion's firmness, as well as his

the battle of Waterloo; in which, after stimulating the veterans of his continental armies by recalling the victories of Austerlitz and Wagram, he appeals to those who had been engaged with ourselves, in these somewhat humiliating terms: 'Que ceux d'entre vous qui ont été prisonniers des Anglais, vous fassent le récit de leurs pontons, et des maux affreux qu'ils ont soufferts.'—*Victoires et conquêtes des français*, 1815.

generosity : but in order to profit both by his errors and good qualities, we must consider the narrative in detail. It seems that, after a rather tedious passage from Sidon, the party arrived at a place called "the fair havens ;" and because in that imperfect state of navigation the season was now dangerous, Paul earnestly forewarned them that the remainder of the voyage would be attended with much damage, not only of the cargo, and the ship, but also of their lives. Nevertheless as the harbour was incommodious to winter in, and the master and owner of the vessel were anxious to leave it, the centurion listened to them rather than to the apostle, and consented to put to sea again. As there is no proof that he had any previous acquaintance with Paul, we cannot attach much blame to him for the decision. It was a mistake which, we may hope, was as much blessed to him in its consequences, as it will be ever to those, who love to examine the ways of providence by the test of Scripture.

The centurion having consented to leave the fair havens, the majority of the party proposed that they should endeavour to make Phenice,

a harbour on the coast of Crete, and winter there. And when the south wind blew softly, and the fineness of the weather and smoothness of the sea had tempted them to believe that the trip was as good as made, they set sail with merry hearts, little thinking how soon the apostle's warning would be brought to their remembrance. For scarcely had they left the havens, when a violent wind arose against them, called, in those days, Euroclydon ; respecting which various opinions have been entertained, but which upon the whole may be supposed to mean a wind to the eastward of north : and many, who have made a winter's voyage up the Mediterranean, may probably have seen with what fury it blows, how long it lasts, and with what gloom and raging of the waters it is accompanied. Even in our time, when navigation has been brought to such perfection, it is a formidable occurrence ; but at the period of which we are discoursing, it must have been attended with so many circumstances of terror, as to appal the most intrepid. For the gale, which was at first a-head, seems soon to have made a sudden shift, and catching the sails

aback, so that the ship would not bear up to the wind, the mariners put down the helm, and let her drive before it. They appear to have been a most unskilful crew, and the vessel scarcely sea-worthy, insomuch that the passengers must have felt as if abandoned to the fury of the waves, and that nothing but an overruling providence could save them. And now as they were running under a small island called Clauda, the ship perhaps straining violently, an attempt was made to hoist out the boat, in order to pass ropes underneath and round the vessel, and thus prevent her timbers from starting. Even this precarious manœuvre was with difficulty accomplished; for the boat which ought to have been perfectly unencumbered, was scarcely to be got at; and after all, what a state was this for two hundred and seventy-six souls to be placed in! But the danger still increased. Whether they had drifted too close to the shore, or were ignorant of the coast, or too well aware of its difficulties, they were now afraid of running upon quicksands; and instead of manfully endeavouring to steer into deep water, they struck their sails as in despair, and again

suffered themselves to drive before the storm. The tempest raged throughout the night, and the ship was exceedingly tossed, so that on the following morning they lightened her; and on the third day, the prisoners with their own hands threw the tackling overboard, the sailors apparently being too despondent to take any further trouble. In this state they continued many days: there was no sun to cheer them at noon, nor stars to guide them by night: ignorant of their course, worn out by fatigue, and appalled by the astonishing fury of the elements, they abandoned all hope of safety, and saw nothing but a fearful death ready to overwhelm them.

This is exactly the point to which providence often brings those, towards whom it has determined to shew mercy. It is now that the mind is prepared to receive a due impression. So long as all goes smoothly, the greatest benefits are received as matters of course; but when distress has reached its climax, and we look in vain for escape, then should some sudden relief be vouchsafed, the proudest can hardly receive the transition without some softening of the

heart, some feeling, however slight, of grateful emotion. Would that these impressions were more durable and more sanctified; that men would not only 'be glad because they are quiet,' but that they would also *continue* "to praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men."

Such, we trust, was the case with Julius and many of his party, for Paul having devoted a considerable time to fasting, and having doubtless accompanied it with earnest prayer, stood forth in the midst of the despairing company, and addressed them thus:—"Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as was

told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island."

The emotions with which this striking answer to the apostle's prayer was received, were doubtless as various as the dispositions of his hearers. Some were melted into thankfulness; some calmly waited for the event, without placing much confidence in the prediction: but none could have been altogether indifferent to the serene and cheerful aspect, with which the apostle related the angelic message. Yet to doubt, and to be selfish, is the character of man: for now, after having been for fourteen days tossed by the tempest, about midnight the sailors discovered that they were approaching land: and being apprehensive lest, on this unknown coast, they should be run among the rocks, they let go four anchors, and anxiously waited for the morning. After so much mutual suffering, it might be expected, that persons endued with ordinary generosity, would forget their individual safety, and prefer to share the common lot of their companions in danger: but these sailors were not of British mould; they thought only of themselves, and regardless of

the rest, they began to lower the boat under the pretence of casting out more anchors, but in reality to flee to shore. Paul anticipated their design ; and being perfectly convinced of the infallibility of the divine promise, he would neither suffer God to be robbed of his honour, nor derange the manner in which He had determined to vindicate it. Cowardice and neglect of duty were not the terms upon which the sailors were to escape ; for these are repugnant to the spirit of the Bible, which every where enjoins us to quit ourselves like men ;¹

* ¹ We have in the course of this chapter ventured to observe, that an education based upon the principles of the Bible, would be the most advantageous for military men ; and perhaps not the least important of its benefits would be the establishment of courage upon principle. We cannot help thinking that this is now left too much to nature. It is a common expression, ‘ Oh, every body is brave ; ’ but the fact is, that every body is not brave ; at least not so as to be firm and dauntless, when those around him, and especially when his leader fails, or when he is exposed to danger without witnesses of his conduct. Courage is an affection ; and if all other affections require to be confirmed by principle, there seems no reason why this should be excepted. We never think of saying, ‘ Every one is kind ; every one is good ; every one amiable ; ’ and then leave it to impulse to make, or to keep them so ; but we teach them that this they ought to be ; and that their religion enjoins it by precept, much stricter than any suggestions of reason or of conscience. It should be the same with courage : and there is abundant encouragement in the Bible, to

nor were the ordinary means of security to be overlooked by the soldiers. All were to be saved: but all were to act as if their safety depended upon their own exertions—a striking example of the conduct incumbent upon those who may be in similar difficulties; and, as it has been considered, a noble illustration of the method, by which the absolute decrees of the divine will are combined with the necessity of human cooperation. Paul therefore assured Julius and the soldiers, that except the sailors abode in the ship, they could not be saved; whereupon they cut the ropes of the boat, and let her fall into the sea. And now as the day was coming on, Paul, who seems to have been the life of the party, and by his cheerful and confident manners to have acquired increasing ascendancy, besought them to take refreshment, assuring them that not a hair should fall from the head of any: then giving thanks to God in the presence of them all, and setting the example, they began to take courage, and eat make the experiment. Indeed, first to be righteous, then to be brave, seems the spirit of Scripture. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion." Prov. xxviii.1

likewise. And when they had eaten enough, they again lightened the ship, throwing the remainder of their wheat overboard; and at day-break discovering a creek where the shore seemed to promise an easy landing place, they weighed anchor, set the mainsail, and endeavoured to drive the ship into it; but falling upon a spot where the waves formed a cross sea, they ran her aground, so that the fore-part stuck fast, whilst the surf, beating violently against the stern, broke it in pieces.

And now a scene of confusion arose, which seemed to threaten the most cruel consequences. The soldiers, forgetful of Paul, and of the encouragement which they had just received from him, and seized with some groundless apprehension that the prisoners would swim out, and escape, proposed that they should all be put to death; and although it was impossible that this barbarous act should be permitted by that providence, which had engaged to save them, yet the frustration of it recalls the centurion to our notice under circumstances greatly calculated to raise him in our esteem. They had been upwards of fourteen days in imminent peril;

they were at last aground on an unknown coast, the ship rapidly going to pieces ; the sailors had proved themselves regardless of the lives of any one, provided they could save their own ; and the soldiers were meditating the slaughter of the helpless prisoners, who had been committed to his immediate charge. The fury of the storm was unabated ; the swell came rolling in from the tempestuous sea ; and each succeeding billow, as it burst over the ship, seemed to threaten destruction, and to laugh the apostle's promise to scorn. In these trying circumstances the character of Julius shone forth: and although he has been hitherto unnoticed by the historian, yet it is evident that he maintained that authority and discipline, which it is the honour of an officer to uphold. We read of no mutiny, nor insubordination, no desperate acts of reckless violence, but an entire submission to his orders from the two hundred and seventy six persons who were in the vessel. Deeply sensible of the assistance which he had received from Paul, he was wise enough to discern, and to appreciate the character of that great apostle ; so that his first care

was to save a man, who, by his holy conversation and wonderful self-possession had shewn himself so highly gifted. He therefore by persuasion and command, kept his men from their purpose; then with that coolness, which marks a superior mind, he directed that those who could swim, should first cast themselves into the sea; and that the remainder, by the help of boards, and fragments of the ship, should float ashore. These orders were obeyed; and so it was that, in strict conformity to the divine revelation, every one escaped safe to land.¹

¹ A circumstance not wholly dissimilar is related in the life of a man whom we are accustomed, justly, to regard as one of the most extraordinary on record. ‘ In returning to Europe, Columbus held a course different from that which he had taken in his former voyage. He steered almost due east from Hispaniola in the parallel of twenty two degrees of latitude; as experience had not yet discovered the more certain and expeditious method of stretching to the north, in order to fall in with the south-west winds. By this ill-advised choice, which, in the infancy of navigation between the new and old worlds, can hardly be imputed to the admiral as a defect in naval skill, he was exposed to infinite fatigue and danger, in a perpetual struggle with the trade-winds, which blow without variation from the east between the tropics. Notwithstanding the almost insuperable difficulties of such a navigation, he persisted in his course with his usual patience and firmness, but made so little way that he was three months without seeing land. At length his provisions began to fail, the crew was reduced to the scanty allowance of six ounces of bread a-day for

It is true that these things were predetermined, and that it was impossible they should happen otherwise; but this does not detract from the merits of the centurion, any more than the positive intention of bringing up the Israelites from Egypt lowers the faith of Moses, who was made the instrument of their triumph. We have a gracious God, who, though all events are obedient to his control, is ready to give credit to those who contribute to bring them to pass: and happy would it be for each of us, did we meditate more upon the things, which he has declared shall happen, and consider how we may promote their accomplishment.¹ They

each person. The admiral fared no better than the meanest sailor. But, even in this extreme distress, he retained the humanity which distinguished his character, and refused to comply with the earnest solicitations of his crew, some of whom proposed to feed upon the Indian prisoners whom they were carrying over, and others insisted to throw them overboard, in order to lessen the consumption of their small stock. He represented that they were human beings, reduced by a common calamity to the same condition with themselves, and entitled to share an equal fate. His authority and remonstrances dissipated those wild ideas suggested by despair. Nor had they time to recur, as he came soon within sight of the coast of Spain, when all their fears and sufferings ended.—*Robertson's History of America*, Vol. i. p. 185.

¹ The things alluded to are the conversion of the Jews, the destruction of idolatry, and the propagation of the gospel among the

would not indeed be fulfilled with more certainty by any efforts of ours ; but we should evince our desire of conforming to his will, and experience the delightful effects of such a disposition, both in our own hearts, and in its influence upon others.

It was a happy event for this Adramyttian vessel, that she had a Paul on board, and a commander like Julius to appreciate his character. From the nature of the voyage they must have been frequently brought into contact, and probably had often conversed in private, as well as upon public business ; nor is it likely that such a devoted Christian as the Apostle, whose energies were absorbed in the one great business of preaching his crucified Lord, would allow these favourable opportunities to escape unimproved. We may imagine them during the early part of the voyage, whilst the weather was yet serene, and the south wind soft and favourable, traversing the deck together ; whilst the venerable apostle

heathen : events all foretold, and all as we believe, to be brought to pass by human co-operation. It is worth while for soldiers to consider how far they can assist.

would point out the glories of creation; and from thence take occasion to diverge to the far more illustrious display of goodness which had shone from the cross of Him who, though their Creator, had condescended to visit earth for the sake of his ruined creatures. We may imagine them during the tempest consulting upon the most efficient measures for the preservation of the people; whilst Paul would still insist upon the indubitable certainty of his prediction, and upon the impossibility that the God, in whom he trusted, could deceive; fortifying his arguments by the advice, which he gave at Lasea, but which the centurion had so unwisely disregarded. The same endeavours to extol his divine Master would have sanctified his conversation with his other shipmates; so that, although we are not informed what degree of spiritual advantage was reaped by them; yet we can scarcely doubt that much of the good order which prevailed, is to be attributed to the respect that, in accordance with the example of Julius, was paid to the exhortations of Paul.

For who can deny that godliness is conducive

to regularity ? Men may, and often do behave well from constitutional, or from professional motives : but nothing can ensure their being calm and collected, obedient to their superiors, compassionate to their fellows, brave, yet gentle in their deportment, so much as the inclining of the heart to religion. The profane soldier fears but one master, and that an earthly one : the devout soldier fears two, an earthly, but especially an heavenly one. The profane soldier is the ready slave to passion ; the devout soldier is guided by principle, and exercises himself to do that which is right under every circumstance. The profane man in the hour of desperation abandons himself to miserable excess, the devout man in the greatest peril shines forth with the steadiest and most admirable lustre.¹

¹ We subjoin the following brief extract from a well-known work, into which if any of our readers have not yet looked, we strongly recommend a perusal of it, satisfied that it will amply repay the trouble both with pleasure and with profit.

‘ If, on reading this imperfect narrative, any persons beyond the immediate circle of my companions in misery (for within it I can safely declare that there were no indications of ridicule) should effect to despise, as contemptible or unsoldier-like, the humble devotional exercises to which I have now referred, I should

The centurion seems to have enjoyed the love of his detachment. They obeyed him without a murmur : they gave up the project of killing the prisoners at his word, and were satisfied to run all risks, seeing that their commander was ready to share the responsibility. Yet this love was not gained by any relaxation of discipline ; nor is the affection of a soldier to be won by conduct, which he is the first to despise. He desires to be governed with humanity indeed, but also with steadiness ; by one, on whom he can depend, who is not turned about by caprice, but knowing what ought to be done, expects neither too much, nor too little. Such an one, we believe, was Julius : and as he seems to have possessed the happy talent of leading men, rather than driving them, we may conclude that they repaid his amiability by a sincere attachment.

like to assure them, that, although they were undoubtedly commenced and prosecuted, much more with an eternal than a temporal object in view, yet they also subserved the important purpose of restoring order and composure amongst a certain limited class of the soldiers, at moments when mere military appeals had ceased to operate with their wonted influence.—*Loss of the Kent Indianaman*, p. 44.

And here can we forget that all mankind are soldiers ; and that if an earthly captain can so win the esteem of his followers by a becoming behaviour, warm indeed is the devotion due to our heavenly one ? He is in all things perfect ; he loves his people with a warmth surpassing comprehension ; he is ever watching over their dearest interests : he knows no change, neither shadow of turning ; he is ever ready to teach them what they should do, and to impart grace and strength to practise it. Can we help being ashamed of the weakness of our affections towards him ? Can we be too sincere in praying that our love may be awakened ; too desirous of being enrolled under his banner, too delighted with the honour, which his service imparts ?

We left the centurion, and those under his charge, safely landed on the beach : and here they discovered that the island, upon which they were cast, was named Melita. This celebrated spot, so famous in the annals of Europe, is thus introduced to our notice as the scene of this memorable shipwreck ; and it is to the credit of its inhabitants that the cave, in which tradition reports St. Paul to have found shelter,

is still pointed out among the most interesting of its curiosities. Notwithstanding the feats of valour, by which its subsequent possessors have been signalized, and the halo of chivalrous romance which history has shed upon its shores, yet does the imagination still love to wing her flight over the intermediate space, and to settle with devout inquisitiveness upon scenes, in which an apostle was inspired to prove the divinity of his religion before their benighted inhabitants. But whilst we yield the full measure of our veneration to the eminent Paul, may we not give the second place in our sympathy to the centurion, the first soldier on the records of an island, in which military men, and military achievements have since abounded? It was a cold and rainy night when they were shipwrecked. From the mode of their escape, some swimming, some floating upon pieces of the wreck, we may conclude that they landed in a state of destitution, and were entirely thrown for subsistence upon the resources of the country. It seems that the inhabitants, though wild in their attire, were compassionate in their hearts; that they lighted fires, and received the strangers

into such habitations as they possessed. Three months they remained with these friendly islanders ; and when at length the season permitted, the whole party quietly re-embarked in a fresh vessel, which had wintered with them, and proceeded on their voyage. There are perhaps few greater trials of discipline, nor scarcely any circumstances in which we are more inclined to form an opinion of an officer's character, than shipwrecks. The many fearful incidents, which generally accompany them, the sudden approach of death under one of its most appalling forms, the reckless desperation, which often tempts men into the wildest excesses, are trials, which call for all the energy of which our nature is susceptible. Nor is the difficulty much abated, should Providence rescue the sufferers from destruction, and make a further trial of their patience by casting them on a lonely shore. Here the sudden transition from death to life, threatens a fresh display of insubordination ; so that it is ever considered a convincing proof of fitness to command, when by previous training, or immediate influence, a numerous crew can be made to preserve an orderly conduct amidst

so many temptations. Such was eminently the case with Julius. As far as we are capable of judging, his whole party conducted themselves with perfect propriety: the sailors, who would have deserted the ship, and left their companions to perish; the soldiers, who would with equal inhumanity have put the prisoners to death; and the prisoners themselves; all seemed to have lived on happy terms with the natives, and to have peacably embarked, followed by their good wishes, when the centurion ordered them.

It is true that Julius was again greatly indebted to Paul. We read that soon after his landing, a deadly viper having fastened upon the Apostle's hand, he shook it off without feeling harm; and that the governor of the island having courteously lodged the party for three days, Paul prayed over his father, who lay dangerously ill, and restored him to health: insomuch that other diseased persons, hearing of the cure came, and were healed in like manner. These miracles, as might be expected, were regarded by the people with the utmost veneration: nor could they fail of strengthening

the impression already made upon the Apostle's companions.

How then is Julius to be proposed as an example to those, who can never expect so powerful a coadjutor? By stimulating them to combine in their own persons the spirit of both; by teaching, that the courage of the soldier is most efficient, when confirmed by the piety of the apostle. There are many who take some favourite hero for their model, without regard to such an union. Dazzled by his energy, his ambition, or his talents, they see in these an illustrious character, and strive to copy them as far as their opportunities will admit. To a certain degree such studies are admissible. We may sometimes muse over the achievements of the great; and let our bosoms expand with a generous desire that we also may be known in our day. But these should be momentary excitements; seasonings to the purer sustenance on which we live; combustibles to rouse the steady fire that supplies our daily energy—and no more. As the bee sucks the flowers, but retires to his hive to make the honey; so may we cull from history her sweets,

but it is in our tents, and with our bibles, that we should knead them into mental aliment. Thus shall we learn to distinguish what is really good ; we shall cease to follow a shadow ; but aiming at a perfect model, we shall obtain a moral position, from which we may bring each virtue into action at its proper season, summoning one to the support of the other, as occasion may require.

But we must diverge from military reflections, and as we have already noticed the humanity and the self-possession of Julius, let us now observe his unquestioning faith and docility. Paul had assured him that all his company should be saved, but when the sailors were meditating their escape, he then declared that no one could be preserved, unless they remained in the ship. If the centurion believed Paul to be capable of penetrating into futurity, he must have been staggered at this seeming contradiction ; if he did not give him credit for that power, he must have been proportionably tempted to think lightly of a man, who would positively assert things, which he had no means of knowing. In either case it was a trial of

faith ; nor do there appear any grounds upon which the centurion could reason, except the opinion that he had formed of Paul. This however was sufficient for him : whatever he had seen in the apostle had awakened his esteem ; and he therefore gave credence to his promise, and set himself to execute his injunctions. And should not such be the disposition of a Christian towards a Being far higher, and more glorious than Paul : One, who possesses foreknowledge in its most unlimited extent ; and not only foreknows, but directs every event that happens ? He has told us who shall be saved out of the stormy waves of life, and has pointed out the means, by which alone their safety can be ensured. He has declared life eternal to be his gift through the merits of his Son, that he is ready to bestow it upon all, but that none can obtain it except by a performance of the things which he has commanded. Let not then a Roman be more docile than ourselves, let not a soldier preach a lesson of faith in vain.

The manliness with which Julius acted up to his convictions, is also worthy of notice. Ac-

cording to the customs of those days, there would perhaps have been nothing very outrageous in his conduct, had he consented to put the prisoners to death. But the heart of Julius was turned towards Paul, and when the hour of trial came, he refused to forsake him. No specious reasonings availed to unsettle him, nor any fear of responsibility to tempt him from his purpose ; but, having once felt the value of the apostle, he allowed neither misgivings nor indecision to deter him from doing it justice. Can every Christian say the same ? Can we declare that no fear of consequences has ever shaken us in confessing a holy Saviour ? We speak not of those, to whom the risk of danger is threatened, as it was to Julius : but has not a mere sense of shame ever kept us silent, when we ought to have caught at the opportunity of expressing our obligations ; and have we not passed over injuries done to his name, in order that we might keep well with men ?

Again, we are called to admire a trait in the centurion's character, which has been already incidentally alluded to as a sure mark of a generous heart, namely, his readiness to appre-

ciate the virtues of Paul. It may be said that we are all inclined to esteem what is good and lovely: but are we always ready to acknowledge its existence? The heart of Julius was of this honourable nature. From the beginning of the voyage it expanded towards his prisoner; and every successive instance of that prisoner's excellence was noticed with genuine candour. He might have looked carelessly upon him: he might have declared the subjects upon which Paul delighted to converse to be beyond his understanding, or out of his sphere; but his good sense and feelings raised him above it, and inspired him to set an amiable example of frankness and liberality.

Thus have we endeavoured to point out a few particulars in which a heathen may not unaptly serve as a model for Christians; and the exhibition is the more gratifying, as affording another proof that the profession of arms may be productive of virtue as well as any other. Most certainly it has its dangers, and perhaps more than the generality of employments, but it has also its advantages; and since, in the actual constitution of the world, there

must, and will be soldiers, it is the wisdom of every parent to teach the young aspirer to cultivate the one, and to beware of the other. Many ways may occur for doing this: he may be entreated not to dishonour his family and profession: he may be stimulated to exertion by the prospect of promotion, or to emulation by the example of his cotemporaries. But the truest system for forming the character is, we fear, the least practised; and in again recommending a study of the Bible, we may appear to indulge in visionary prospects of success. Yet we must again express our doubts, whether an intelligent developement of the various military lives and maxims contained in that inspired book, would not fortify the mind, and enlighten the understanding, more than any mode of instruction whatever. Of course it is not pretended that such an investigation would supersede the necessity of professional or general study; but we apprehend that military virtues and faults, would be found so strikingly illustrated in the pages of scripture, as to lay the surest foundation of an honourable career. Indeed if they did no more than sub-

stitute principle for impulse, the majority of mankind would have abundant cause to rejoice in the exchange.

Such are the remarks, which have arisen from the consideration of this celebrated shipwreck : but may we not carry them further, and under the image of the Roman officer contemplate the human race. All are in the eyes of heaven centurions ; all are sailing upon life's uncertain ocean, each in the ship or station to which providence has appointed him. In the master and owner of the vessel, the selfish mariners, and the ungrateful soldiers, are aptly represented the tempers and passions which God has commanded us to control ; whilst in the divine apostle and his companions are shewn the Christian graces and dispositions entrusted to our care. Calm and gentle are the waters upon which, like the centurion, we commence our voyage ; no difficulties retard our way ; the sunshine of youth beams upon the horizon ; and we launch upon the deep filled with hope, and joyful anticipations of uninterrupted success. For awhile perhaps we cherish the virtuous dispositions, which a kind providence, and

a careful education have instilled into our bosoms. We indulge them, as Julius favoured Paul: we entreat them courteously; we give them liberty to go unto their friends to refresh themselves; to acquire fresh vigour by soaring aloft in communion with their divine author, or by revisiting the scenes, in which an affectionate parent has watched, and prayed for our welfare. Would indeed that this were always the case, and that all began their voyage, as Julius did; that we did not at once cast away restraint, nor suffer our evil propensities to get the ascendancy over us.

But the wind begins to shift. The breeze which has hitherto carried us quietly forward, now veers against us, and we find that trials and difficulties are the appointed lot of all below. Our course through life is slow; we have fixed our mind on some alluring object, and think the time will never come for its attainment. Perhaps it is distinction, honour, or wealth, to which we aspire: they seem legitimate objects of ambition, as a speedy arrival at Rome probably appeared a matter of duty to the centurion: and should Providence for a time allot

us some quiet haven, we are dissatisfied with it, as insufficient for that enjoyment which imagination pictures. And now we must resolve between two advisers. On the one hand are the owner and master of the ship, the world and our own hearts: on the other, the dictates of revelation exemplified in the apostle. How different are the suggestions of these two counsellors. 'Be distinguished, be rich,' says the one, 'at any price. Look at all the honours which the world has to bestow. Who are the great, the renowned ones of the earth? Are they not the men, who have boldly ventured upon difficulties; and what would they have been, had they listened to the calm, inanimate cautions, which were never meant for souls of enterprise?'—'Be patient,' pleads the other, 'be humble; enter not upon a career pregnant with danger. Strictly endeavour to do your duty; and be satisfied that your efforts will at length be crowned with that measure of success which is most for your real interest.' Alas! Julius was too faithful a type of the generality of his fellow-mortals. In an ill-judging hour he listened to the suggestions of the master and

owner of the vessel ; and rejected the wise and inspired advice of the apostle. No doubt he gave them credit for superior sagacity. What could Paul understand of navigation in comparison with men who had been engaged in it from their infancy ? Storms and tempests might terrify him, which to them were no more than the element, in which they were at home. He might be content to put up with inconveniences ; whereas they were persuaded that, by putting again to sea, they should be rewarded with a large and commodious harbour. Thus do the young prefer the reasonings of the world to the warnings of conscience, and impute the caution of those more humble than themselves to timidity, and want of talent.

But, like Julius, they must take the consequences ; and having made their choice, must learn by experience what measure of success we are competent to ensure to our most promising schemes. Like him, they again set sail ; and as perhaps for a while the south wind blows softly, and their affairs seem to be proceeding favourably, they congratulate themselves upon the prospect of attaining their

object, and joke at the scruples, that would have detained them in a situation which they despised. Little do they think how soon the time will arrive, when they shall look back upon it with regret, and sigh over the discontent which made them ever wish for change. For now the difficulties of life again gather around ; adverse winds again retard their progress ; their most diligent application, not being directed by proper motives, fails of attaining that distinction which they had confidently anticipated : the jealousy of rivals interferes to keep them back : or, if indulged in their own bosoms, becomes the torment of their lives. Temptations beset them ; and unruly passions are perpetually prompting them to stifle Christian reflection, and to rid themselves of a troublesome charge. Let such contemplate Julius : he rejected the advice of Paul, and danger and terror had ever since beset his way ; but he had never ceased to respect the venerable apostle. Amidst the perils of the storm, he had found ample opportunity of chewing the bitter, but salutary cud of experience, and had grown convinced how far better it would have fared

with him, had he submitted to his advice. In vain, therefore, did the soldiers propose to ensure their own lives by sacrificing him. Julius had determined at all risks to save his revered charge, and now preferred to give up every thing, rather than abandon the treasure which he possessed in his society. Happy Julius! and happy those who follow in his steps; who made wise by trials, and brought to a sense of their errors, resolutely determine by the grace of God, to bring into subjection those passions, to which they have heretofore been enthralled, and to cherish those holy dispositions, which they have neglected to their sorrow. Let them persevere in their gracious choice: they need not fear the change: life will not glide away less gladly, nor will they be one bit further from securing that respect and love, which have perhaps stood prominently forward in their ambitious longings. For what might have been the lot of Julius, had he agreed to put Paul to death? With guilt on his conscience, he might have reached the shore; but no beneficent miracles would have signalized his arrival, nor won the favour of the islanders. His men,

emboldened by the facility with which he yielded to their violence, might have attempted further encroachments, despised his authority, and perhaps entangled themselves in a perilous warfare with their now hospitable entertainers. Should he have escaped alive, he might arrive at Rome ; but it would be with a reputation lost, peace of mind destroyed, and a life perhaps in jeopardy to the laws of his profession.

Such also is the career of him, who prefers to obey his passions rather than his Saviour. Dead to those acts of Christian beneficence, which become the favourite occupation of the converted, he is a stranger to the gratitude and esteem with which such conduct is regarded by his fellow-creatures. The evil propensities of his nature grow more imperious with each succeeding victory : and even should he at last gain that worldly distinction for which he has panted, yet he has neither honour, nor love, nor friends to bless him, with the prospect of a fearful doom from his offended maker. “ Oh ! that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end.” Then would the world cease to engross them : a happy

equanimity would regulate their desires, and having resolutely chosen "the one thing needful," they would have a safe guide through the trials, with which a busy life is sure to be beset.

But the history of Julius is not less deserving of consideration, as illustrative of Christian experience. When by the grace of God a sinner is called into his service, new desires and impulses, to which he has hitherto been a stranger, are committed to his care. He feels himself called upon to watch over, and cherish them, to keep them free from the assaults of sin, and to be ready to render an account of them, when his voyage shall be completed. How sweet is the glow which accompanies his sacred trust: how subduing the influences, which, hourly distilled into his bosom, like the south wind breathing upon the ocean, infuse a calm, of which he has hitherto had no comprehension. With what serenity does he enter upon the duties of his new appointment. Yet though that Spirit, who is in truth a comforter, thus freely vouchsafes to extend to him these tokens of life, still he is liable to temptation:

the evil within him has met with a powerful counteraction—but it still exists; and the world and the Devil will watch their opportunity to rekindle it.

At this crisis of his experience, let Julius be his instructor. Though Paul had been entrusted to his care, yet he preferred the counsel of a heathen; and into what tempests and dangers did his choice lead him. So should the renewed man again sin wilfully, sad, and awful is the retribution, with which he must expect to be visited. What fearful storms will Satan raise within him. The light against which he has offended, will be withdrawn, doubt and irresolution will bewilder his course: the hopes of heaven will be lost, and he will drive before the wind of passion like an abandoned being. But mark the goodness of God. He does not utterly renounce those whom he has visited, and is still willing to heal even his backsliding children. There is an intercessor ever ready to pray even for the most rebellious; and a comforter to revive the graces, which he strove, oh, how earnestly, though in vain, to preserve from their sad depravation.

All that he asks is repentance: let but the sinner turn again in his career; let him acknowledge the iniquity of his ways, and sigh for that Saviour, whom he has so fatally rejected: and he will cast a look of compassion upon him, and once more lead him into the way of happiness. The trial may indeed be painful, the conflict arduous. That renewal which was before vouchsafed freely, and unasked for, must now perhaps be sought through years of suspense and labour; and the holy influences which formerly animated the whole man with joy, will now be granted only at intervals, and rather as encouragements, than as food to be daily feasted upon. Nevertheless the work is proceeding: the pride and self-conceit which foreran his fall, are now subdued into humility and self-knowledge: experience has taught her salutary lesson, and the two worlds are at length estimated at something like their relative value. Above all, we may hope, he has been led to see the beauty of redeeming love. The plan has been graciously revealed to him, by which even sins like his can be forgiven: and he can rejoice that all the honour of his salvation shall

belong to the Saviour, and none to his own deserts. Shall he now turn again to his vices, and to the world? Shall any suggestions tempt him to forget that Saviour? The very idea is painful; he throws himself on his knees, and earnestly prays to be delivered from so base an apostasy. He dreads the weakness of his nature as the greatest of evils: he looks back with pain, and self-abasement, to those crimes by which he has hitherto insulted his Maker; and fixes his mind intently upon the means by which he shall henceforward prove his repentance. Yet let not such an one imagine that he shall no more be tempted. So long as life endures, he will be solicited to evil; and as the soldiers would have had their way, notwithstanding their centurion's attachment to Paul, so will a corrupt nature strive against the believer, notwithstanding his new impressions. He will, perhaps, flatter himself that he has grown acquainted with his heart, and has taken precautions against his besetting sin: but it is too true, that we are desperately wicked, and that corruptions sleep within us, of which we have no conception until they are awakened.

In fact, life is a warfare ; and it is vain to deny, or to qualify, this great truth.

Let then, Julius, be still our guide. He had found out the value of Paul ; and no trials, no sudden dangers, nor prospects of advantage, could persuade him to abandon his preserver. The consequences have already appeared, and we have seen himself, and his whole company visited with mercy, saved, protected, and perhaps converted by the decision. Such, we are assured, will be the case with every one, who sincerely abides by God. No sacrifice will be unrewarded ; no token of adoration suffered to pass unnoticed. His intercessor will have pleaded for him : all things will be made to work together for his good ; and at length, like the centurion, he shall be brought in safety to his destination, and enabled to render a faithful account of whatsoever has been committed to his charge.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CENTURION AT CAPERNAUM.

MATT. viii. 5. Luke vii. 1.

Universal application of sacred history—Capernaum the residence of this centurion—Sickness of his servant—Arrival of Jesus—The centurion determines to apply to him—Retrospective view of the centurion's life—State of Capernaum—The centurion a man of property—Danger of riches—His liberal piety—Application to modern colonies—The centurion sends the elders to Jesus to intercede for him—His humility—Our Lord's behaviour—The centurion's exalted ideas of him—His preparations to receive him—His faith—Importance and nature of faith—The encomium passed upon the centurion by our Lord.—The promise—Comparison of crusaders and centurion—Conclusion of the interview—Subsequent career of the centurion.

IN entering upon the character of these centurions, we cannot help being struck with the universality of application, that distinguishes the gospel history. Were we called upon to select from the annals of our own, or any other

country, the individuals most entitled to imitation, we should in all probability be driven to fix upon men, whose rank, talents, or achievements have raised them to preeminence over their cotemporaries, and procured them a place in records, which do not pretend to notice instances of merit, unless adorned with those adventitious attractions. The illustrious actions of a Marlborough, a Nelson, or a Wellington would be pointed out to the admiring eyes of the young enquirer; and he would be urged to emulate virtues which are sure to win the applause of every age. But it would perhaps be forgotten, that many of those great qualities require peculiar opportunities for development; and that others have only been bestowed upon a favoured few. Much time would thus be risked in the contemplation of excellence never to be realized; and a visionary dream might steal away the best of his years, and find him at last still busy in picturing how he would put forth his energies, should circumstances permit, rather than improving the advantages already in his power.

Very different are the models exhibited in

holy writ. Though the highest rank, and the noblest talents may there find their prototype, yet is there no station, nor degree of understanding, that needs to search its pages in vain. The character which they call upon us to cultivate, asks for no especial field, but may be fostered amidst the most ordinary employments of daily life; and as the principles laid down are no less clear than faultless, there is no danger of the error, so common to those who imitate worldly accomplishments, the being misled by what they fancy would be the behaviour of their idol amidst events, which can rarely happen in two cases alike. The officer, whose history we are about to consider, furnishes us with an example of the above description. Nothing can be more plainly delineated than his character, nothing more decisive than the approbation bestowed upon it: yet in his condition of life he was on a footing with other men: nor were genius, rank, or public excitement necessary for the practice of any of those graces, for which he was so distinguished. Doubtless there were great men in the Roman armies of those days, who were considered

happy and fortunate officers; yet it is not to the commander of a legion, that we are referred for instruction, but to a simple, devout centurion.

It was at Capernaum, a town situated on the northern shore of the sea of Galilee, inhabited by Jews, but bordering on the frontier, which separated the holy land from the Gentiles, that we find him stationed with his company. In the course of his sojourn, there arrived a very extraordinary personage, who, although at first but little known, soon became the subject of wonder and conversation throughout the country. This was no other than the holy Jesus, who, after the imprisonment of John the Baptist, had left the banks of Jordan, and was come, like the sun shining into darkness, to dwell in the distant parts of Galilee. Here he entered upon the public preaching of the gospel: from its inhabitants he selected many of his disciples; and in the city, and its vicinity, began to perform those astonishing miracles, by which he manifested his divinity. Though the fame of these great events may have been listened to with various feelings of faith, or incre-

dulity ; love, or envy, according to the dispositions of individuals ; yet it could not fail of exciting universal attention ; and amongst others, it would necessarily reach the ears of an officer who, stationed in the town for the preservation of order, would naturally make himself acquainted with events so much out of the routine of daily occurrences. But, as will be seen hereafter, there is every reason to conclude that the centurion would not be satisfied with mere hearsay assertions of our Lord's excellency : and that, as Jesus was in the habit of teaching in the synagogue, he would not suffer such eminent opportunities of hearing the word of God to escape him. The same temper would often lead him to follow his instructor in the intermissions of prayer ; when he would see the sick healed, devils cast out, lunatics restored to reason, and no malady, to which our nature is exposed, unpitied, or unrelieved. Thus would he become personally acquainted with the power and goodness of Jesus, and the seeds of that faith would be sown, which were soon to produce a harvest of such wonderful richness.

During one of those temporary absences, in

which our Lord was accustomed to dispense the benefits of the gospel through the surrounding country, a servant belonging to this centurion lay dangerously ill at his house. Saint Luke informs us that he was dear to him ; nor is it difficult to assign a cause, from which the affection may have originated. The servant no doubt was a faithful one, perhaps made faithful by a religious master. He may have lived long in his service ; or, what is more likely, he may have been converted through his instrumentality to a knowledge of the same faith, which the centurion, though a Roman, will appear to have adopted. Either supposition argues that the centurion had a kind, considerate heart, qualities, which his devout turn of mind would have improved, perhaps called into being. And here it is pleasant to observe, how gentle the soldiers of those early days were to their dependents. What can be more affectionate than the expostulation of Naaman's servants with that captain of the host of Syria : " My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it ? " ¹ or more

¹ 2 Kings v. 13.

condescending than his compliance with their intreaties? But indeed true courage is always merciful: and hence, if it is allowable to judge by analogy, we may infer that the centurion was not only an humane, but a brave man.

Deeply solicitous for his servant's recovery, no doubt he had used every means that art and medicine could suggest. All his efforts, however, had proved unsuccessful; and as the sick man lay at the point of death, his master would soon have to deplore the loss of an endeared domestic. At this eventful moment Jesus entered Capernaum; the multitudes that followed would speedily publish his arrival, and a ray of hope begin to brighten the centurion's breast. All the great qualities of the Saviour would recur to his remembrance. His unwearied goodness, his great compassion, his invariable practice never to refuse relief, and his undoubted power to make it effectual, would crowd upon his recollection, and urge him to seek assistance where he felt a noble assurance that it would be granted. What a lesson does this Roman teach us of the conduct that we ought to pursue in our distresses. "Come unto me all ye that

labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ; "¹ was the invitation addressed to men in his days, and is still repeated with undiminished goodness to each of us. The same Saviour, who so freely listened to the multitudes that closed around him, with all their varied tales of sorrow, in the streets of Capernaum, still stretches out his hand to all the world. He may not perhaps deal with us according to our short-sighted wishes, but strictly according to our wants ; for he knows what is really good for us ; and with a glance that connects the world in which we live, with that to which we shall soon be removed, He measures his pity not by our present brief necessities, but by our eternal welfare.

The centurion, having resolved to apply to Jesus, lost no time in making his petition ; and the frame of mind in which he meditated doing so, is remarkable. The story is variously related by the two evangelists, but the difference between them is easily reconcileable. St. Matthew tells us that he went in person to

¹ Matt. xi. 28.

Jesus; St. Luke, that he called for the elders of the Jews, and sent them: and it has been thought that the one is only a mode of expression, by which an individual is said to do that for himself, which he authorizes others to do for him. But when the feelings, which occupied the bosom of the centurion are considered, it will seem probable that both accounts are equally literal; and that he first sent the elders to intercede for him; and subsequently went in person, accompanied by some friends, to whom he expressed his wishes, and intreated them to repeat the same to Jesus. The predominant sentiments evidently were, anxiety for his servant, profound veneration for the wonderful personage to whom he looked for relief, undoubting faith that he both could and would grant it, and a deep sense of his own unworthiness.

There cannot be a doubt that, as in the case of the dying thief, many of these Christian graces have been the fruit of instantaneous conversion, when it has pleased God thus to operate upon the heart of an individual. But as no one can reasonably expect such a visitation,

so it does not appear to have been granted to the centurion. It will therefore be profitable to divide the consideration of his history into two parts; and before we apply ourselves to the immediate event of his appeal to Jesus, to take a retrospective view of his life, and to observe how he was gradually brought to a degree of faith, unparalleled even in Israel. The arguments pleaded in his favour by the elders, furnish us with these particulars; and enable us to analyze the character of this exemplary officer. "And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue."

The first remark which occurs to us, is that the centurion had long been a worshipper of the true God. How he acquired this knowledge of Jehovah we are not informed; but it seems evident that he was so; and that his excellent and benevolent character had been, under divine assistance, both the ground-work and the fruit of his conversion. Amiability would have led him to love his servants and to be kind to his

neighbours; but amiability would not have prevailed upon him to build a synagogue for a people whose religion he disregarded; nor have ensured that admirable consistency, which regulated his conduct. For these there must have been a deeper principle, a master feeling to which all others were subservient; and as we muse upon his history, we discover in the desire of honouring God, the pure and sacred fountain from which his actions flowed.

Secondly, as, like the other centurions mentioned in the Gospel, he had been living, if not exactly in a colony, yet in a province, so he had fulfilled the part of a benefactor to it. The territory, in which duty had placed him, had been won by the Roman arms; it was governed by a Roman governor; and the soldiers under him were stationed at Capernaum to control, as well as to protect, the inhabitants. Thus circumstanced, it would have been easy for him to regard with a hostile eye his subjected, but still turbulent neighbours: he might have looked down upon them as a people, with whose customs it was beneath the dignity of a Roman to trouble himself: or he might have considered

himself stationed among them for the fulfilment of his military duty, but under no obligation to bestow a thought upon their welfare. He might in short, have acted like a man who holds himself a bird of passage, and cares not whether the trace, which even the shortest sojourner must necessarily leave, be profitable or hurtful. But as we have seen his tenderness for his family, so we have now to contemplate the same generous affections expanding over the province ; affections of so endearing a nature, that the Jews were constrained to describe them in the emphatic words, "he loveth our nation." It is true there were circumstances connected with that people, which would operate with peculiar force upon the centurion's mind. Studious as we believe him to have been of the oracles of his adopted faith, he would conclude that, notwithstanding their subjection, the Israelites were still the chosen people ; that the Lord had marked them for his own from the beginning ; and that through them the true religion had been preserved amidst the idolatries of the pagan world. These reflections would awaken his sympathies towards them,

in an especial degree : but in the same inspired pages he would find precepts of benevolence not confined to one particular nation, but equally applicable to any people, amongst whom providence should appoint his residence.¹ Thus it would have been impossible for a man of his loving disposition to be indifferent, let him have

¹ Among the numberless valuable instructions with which the Bible abounds, not the least interesting are the rules which God delivered to the Jews through Jeremiah, for their guidance during the captivity of Babylon. Encouraged by their false prophets to expect that in two years they should cast off the yoke, they considered their residence of too transient a nature, either to provide for their own welfare, or to regard the good of the country. But the prophet was directed to give them other views ; and to teach them that so long as they were living in Babylon, the place which God had appointed them, so long they should consider it their home, and act by it accordingly. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon ; build ye houses, and dwell in them ; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters ; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters, that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city, whether I have caused you to be carried away captives ; and pray unto the Lord for it : for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." Jeremiah xxix. 4. Many of these particulars must of course be qualified in applying them to those, whom duty has taken to a distant land ; but the spirit of the passage is worthy the consideration of all, however short their sojourn may be.

been placed where he might ; and as true love is never passive, he would have been ever meditating how to be of use ; and by the union of charity and faith would exhibited the same character in any other part of the world, as at Capernaum.

And here let us remember what sort of a town this Capernaum was. Strange as it may appear, not all the miracles, nor all the virtues even of Jesus had been able to prevail upon its inhabitants to reflect. He had entered upon his ministry by calling on them to repent : he had invited them by words, such as never man spake ; and confirmed his entreaties by the most astonishing acts of mercy and of power ; and yet after dwelling amongst them for months, he was compelled to denounce them as a lost people, because, notwithstanding all their privileges, and all his mighty works, they listened not. “ And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell ; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of

Sodom in the day of Judgment than for thee.”¹ No one then can possibly be considered placed in circumstances less favourable to religion than this centurion. Yet like the seraph Abdiel,

————— faithful found,
Among the faithless, faithful only he,
Among innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal :
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind.

PARADISE LOST, vi. 5.

What an apology for the best expectations, that may be entertained of any one thrown in the way of temptation ! Who shall plead occupation or amusement as an excuse for religious neglect, when he sees these impediments disregarded or overcome by one surrounded by Pharisees and Sadducees, by heathens and idolaters ?

We have considered the centurion as a proselyte to the Jewish faith, and a man of singular benevolence : we are now to contemplate him as one, upon whom Providence had bestowed an abundance of worldly goods : for although he might have saved enough from his pay to

¹ Matt. xi. 23.

be liberal to a certain extent, yet we shall rather allow him to have been a man of property, as many of his rank were. It has been said, " how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God : " ¹ and when we reflect upon the many hindrances which, as in the case of the young ruler, turn away the wealthy from a sanctified use of their money, we are constrained to acknowledge that, without assistance the thing is impossible. How many allurements for instance must there have been in the garrison of Capernaum. Putting out of the question all grosser objects of expense, there was the popularity of keeping a generous table, the excitement of promoting pleasant amusements, the vanity of showing off a handsome equipage, and fine horses: indulgences pardonable, nay perhaps laudable within moderate bounds, but ah ! with what difficulty trained to be subject to higher objects. Or if the centurion was proof against such temptations, if lavish expence had no fascination in his eyes, were there not snares of a meaner texture,

¹ Mark x. 24.

from which he would have to extricate himself? Can we look abroad upon the world, nay, can we look into ourselves, and not confess the sad unwillingness of a fallen nature to make sacrifices in the cause of religion: how averse we are from such an application of our money, solely because the call is holy; how apt to magnify every outlay incurred for God, and to seek satisfaction in self-complacency, when conscience would strike the balance between our own and his expenditure. Alas! if such blights ruin the growth of Christian fruit, should we have reason to wonder, had they prevailed with tenfold deadliness, ere the heart was watered with spiritual dew, or warmed by the influence of the Sun of Righteousness. But although the centurion no doubt experienced weaknesses, from which no flesh is exempt, still they were not permitted to take root within him. Vanity found no resting place in his bosom; the desire of eclipsing others would have been folly in his eyes. He felt that money had been entrusted to him for worthier purposes; that it was a talent for which he must one day render a strict account: and his heart recoiled at the

idea of wasting, or hoarding that which well dispensed, might, like the gracious rain, refresh, and fertilize wherever it fell.

The natural process for such a person would be to cast his eyes over society, and carefully to investigate the channels through which his liberality might most beneficially flow; and whilst he appropriated a due proportion to the relief of temporal distress, he would feel that he was doing only half his duty, should he leave the spiritual destitution of the province unnoticed. If the additional obligation of the government was to protect the trade, to enforce the laws, and watch over its general interests, the truest benefit which an individual could confer, would be to assist that government in increasing the facilities for the cultivation of religion. How then could this be done more effectually, than by giving the people opportunities of attending public worship? In the pages of Scripture he would find the most eminent men, in circumstances somewhat like his own, earnestly intent upon such objects. When Abraham the father of the faithful, and first great colonist on record, journeyed from his

native land to seek an abode in a distant country;¹ at no place, where he stopped, upon his long expedition, did he fail to mark his gratitude to his Protector by erecting an altar, upon which he might offer the daily sacrifice. David the monarch, and the soldier, whose life had been well nigh taken up with the dangers and excitement of war, no sooner found himself established on the throne, than his heart at once was fixed upon a similar expression of devotion. "Lo! I dwell in a house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord remaineth under curtains,"² was his pathetic remark to the prophet Nathan; and so deeply had he been persuaded of his obligations in regard to this great duty, that he vowed a vow unto the God of Jacob, "that he would not come into the tabernacle of his house, nor go up into his bed; that he would not give sleep to his eyes, nor slumber to his eyelids, until he found out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob."³

These were examples eminently calculated to

¹ Gen. xii, 8. xiii, 18.

² 1 Chron. xvii, 1.

³ Psa. cxxxii, 3—5.

strike a military man stationed in a province. Here were two of the most devoted believers upon record, the one a colonist and the friend of God, the other a soldier, and the man after God's own heart, both evincing the sincerity of their faith by the same expression of feeling; namely, the provision of suitable places where He, to whom worship is due, might receive the adoration of his creatures, and not be treated with neglect whilst every thing else was sedulously attended to. Such, it may be presumed, were also the sentiments of the centurion: as a converted man plucked from the darkness of paganism, he would feel the same overflowings of affection as Abraham when emerging from Egypt to seek the promised land, or as David when raised from a sheepfold to all the splendour of the throne of Israel. He did not therefore hesitate what to do. The opportunity of testifying his gratitude was seized with eagerness, and with a noble liberality he signalized his abode in Capernaum by building a synagogue. The consequences were that the Jews, who hated their conquerors, freely bore testimony to his merits; nor can we doubt that his

beneficence softened their national prejudices, and inclined them to a more peaceable demeanour towards the whole nation. In his own person he was unconsciously hastening the fulfilment of that great promise, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance :" whilst he was benefitting posterity by an example, which would be recorded for the edification of mankind to all ages.

And here let us ask, what would have been the conduct of this Roman, had he lived in modern times, had he for instance been a British officer in a British colony. True religion is ever the same: the word of God changeth not: and the spiritual affections, which were kindled in the bosoms of the faithful of those days, were one in character and in effect, with the inspirations of the same divine instructor now. Love is still their essence: nor assuredly would the centurion feel his responsibility the less, because what was then comparatively dim, is now so clearly revealed. Doubtless had Providence postponed his existence, and ordained him to be stationed in a modern colony, he would consider himself under increased obli-

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fied ; and that the other left Paul in prison, although he had long been no crime could be proved against him. The event corresponded to the means. The esteemed centurion was beloved, and the selfish time-serving governors had been despised.

He thus endeavoured to trace the path by which the centurion may have been

personal friends, but done great credit to his people. He gratified to know that, at the national festival recently, he very distinctly approved of the instructions given to the missionaries, and that they ought to feel grateful for the important services received through the instrumentality of their *Missionary Enterprizes in the South Sea Islands*.

By JOHN WILLIAMS.

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² Acts xxiv. 27.

rose that the person, accompanying the troubler in coming to him of Jesus, he saw Jews, beseeching him to intercede for his servant, who was besought to be worthy for he loveth our synagogue. " I peet did these enemies ! Deeply impressed with

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¹ Matt. iv. 23.

² Matt. viii. 2, 5.

gations to benefit it by all the means in his power. If it were an old established one, he would ask with regret whether military defences and political institutions had not left too much room for complaints of religion neglected. If it were a new one, he would pity the wants of a poor, and growing population, anxious for spiritual sustenance, and willing to co-operate in securing it; but struggling with the world, and its difficulties, and grateful to any benevolent hand, that will stretch itself forth to their assistance. A very little observation would convince him that the first foundations of a country are every thing; and that unless religion is carefully provided for, there is no guarantee against the intrusion of every kind of evil: whilst as a man he would glow with all those kind emotions, which community of language and blood can scarcely fail to awaken amongst the descendants from the same race in a distant land. For the centurion, whose warm heart could melt at the necessities of a people decidedly hostile to his own, it would be impossible not to discern his duty under circumstances so surpassing in interest. Gladly would

he embrace the opportunity of doing incalculable good ; of sowing the seed, whose fruit succeeding generations should reap ; and of laying his humble tribute of gratitude upon the altar of the Saviour, whom he adored.

But it may be objected that the centurion was a man of fortune ; and that it is idle to propose the conduct of such a person as an example to others, whose circumstances make it impossible for them to follow it. We have granted that he was a man of fortune ; and it is interesting to see a rich man, so many hundred years ago, selecting the same channel, which the wealthy of modern days consider the most appropriate for the overflowings of their abundance. But happily for Great Britain, and her colonies, Christian philanthropy may now be exercised at a trifling expense. Those great societies, which so eminently distinguish the present age, seem made for the multiplication of good by easy, individual sacrifices ; and if no more were done than frankly to co-operate with them, the benefits that might result, can scarcely be calculated. An officer, who during his residence in a colony, would act as secretary to

a Bible Association ; or take an interest in the schools ; or watch with an impartial eye the various machinery now in action for the evangelization of the world ; and who, as duty removed him from place to place, would persevere in this worthy course, might render a most important service to religion, and to mankind. Most of those engaged in such designs are men, whose circumstances do not permit them to visit those remote spots, and who would probably receive as a boon information coming from candid and conscientious eyewitnesses. As for the colonists, the very circumstance of military men engaging in such pursuits would be sure to attract their attention, and give a weight to the subject, which it is to be lamented that its sacred character does not always ensure. Nor can we imagine that they would be less grateful than the Jews were to the centurion. Many are the hearts in those young communities, that would respond to such disinterested charity, and bless the generous benefactor, who could think his time and money well bestowed in promoting their dearest interests.¹

¹ We appeal to those who have resided in a colony, and made

Nor can we pass unnoticed the striking contrast between the genuine attempts of a good man to serve his fellow creatures, and the unworthy efforts of a worldly one to cultivate popularity. No persons could be more anxious to ingratiate themselves with the Jews, than the

themselves acquainted with the feelings of its inhabitants, whether what we have stated is not correct; and it is with pleasure we subjoin the following extracts from a work not long ago published; which, although not, strictly speaking, referring to a colony, yet tend to confirm the value of naval and military countenance in a young country. After mentioning Captains Waldegrave and Lawes, Mr. Williams the author adds, 'I gladly embrace this opportunity of stating, that the commanders and officers of those vessels of war, both from England and the United States of America, which have visited the stations occupied by myself, have, without exception, evinced the same friendly disposition. The countenance of such gentlemen has been of inestimable advantage in the prosecution of our arduous labours, by strengthening the confidence of the people in their missionaries; but more especially by counteracting the base insinuations and vile misrepresentations of runaway sailors and others, who have occasionally caused much inconvenience.'

Again—The visit of captain Lord Byron to the Sandwich Islands appears to have been equally beneficial with that of Captain Waldegrave to the Society Group. In reference to the former, the American missionaries, when writing to the Secretary of the London Missionary Society, observe—' The visit of Lord Byron has, we believe, been exceedingly pleasing to the people; and we are happy to say that he has performed a truly honourable part in his intercourse with the chiefs and also with the mission.

' The affability, the kindness, and amiable deportment he has uniformly manifested, has been much admired, and has not only

Roman governors cotemporary with these centurions. We read that "Pilate was willing to content the people,"¹ and again, that Felix was "willing to shew the Jews a pleasure ;"² but what did they do to accomplish their end? Did they build synagogues, or take any other steps for the improvement of the province? All that we hear is, that the one released Barabbas, a robber and a murderer, and delivered Jesus to be crucified; and that the other left Paul bound, and in prison, although he had long been aware that no crime could be proved against him. But the event corresponded to the means. The disinterested centurion was beloved, and respected: the selfish time-serving governors have ever since been despised.

We have thus endeavoured to trace the steps by which the centurion may have been

gained him many personal friends, but done great credit to his country. You will be gratified to know that, at the national council held here but recently, he very distinctly approved of the attention of the natives to the instructions of the missionaries, and assured the chiefs that they ought to feel grateful for the important benefits they had received through the instrumentality of their Christian teachers.—*Missionary Enterprizes in the South Sea Islands*, pp. 224, 39. By JOHN WILLIAMS.

¹ Mark xv. 15.

² Acts xxiv. 27.

brought to that excellent frame of mind, in which we find him at our Lord's entry into Capernaum. We now resume the immediate object of this inquiry, namely, his conduct subsequent to that event: and, although it does not appear of much importance that the two evangelists should be literally reconciled; yet we shall adhere to our original impression, and suppose that the centurion first sent the elders to intercede for him; and afterwards went in person, accompanied by some friends, to deprecate the trouble which Jesus was about to take in coming to his house. "And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus they besought him instantly, saying, that he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue."¹ What a genuine tribute of respect did these elders thus pay to this excellent man! Deeply indeed must they have been impressed with his virtues to make this earnest

¹ Luke vii. 3.

appeal in his behalf: and powerful was the interest which he had awakened throughout the community, that the elders of the people should embrace his cause as their own, and in a body beseech, almost as a public favour, that Jesus would grant his request. Such are the characters which give a charm to biographical history; which enliven and illustrate precept, and win the heart to the imitation of what is lovely. In the conduct of a fellow creature we read our own capabilities: nor can any sophistry satisfy the conscience for the neglect of duties which others of the same passions as ourselves have not merely enjoined, but practised before us.

But we are to consider why the centurion did not go at first to plead his own cause; and why he employed others to do that which the greatness of his distress, and the urgency of the case might naturally have excited him to attempt at once, and in person. Alarmed at the danger in which his servant lay, a man of a less spiritual mind would have hurried to Jesus and entreated him, as many did, to come down without delay, before the sick person should die. But the centurion gives us a fine example of true humili-

lity. Deeply penetrated with the wonderful character of our Lord, and satisfied that a personage, to whom even the devils were obedient, could be no mere mortal like himself, he did not think his presence worthy to be intruded upon so august a being ; but in lowly adoration prostrated his heart before him, and awaited with pious resignation the answer to his prayer. He knew himself to be a Gentile, and a sinner ; and standing afar off he would not so much as let his voice be heard ; but entreated those, whom in honour he preferred, to go with his message to the Saviour, and supplicate assistance with entreaties more worthy than any which he could offer. Far was he from mistrusting the mercy of Jesus : all, of which he was diffident, was his own desert ; and although the most tender-hearted anxiety occupied his bosom, yet, having made his wants known, he did not presume to venture further, but submitted them entirely to the disposal of one, who, he was assured, would order all things for the best. Had the petition been refused, he would have mourned for a departed friend ; but he would have returned without a murmur to the duties of his station ;

more meek, but more confirmed in piety than before.

We admire the character of the soldier; let us now observe the behaviour of our Lord; and in doing so, let us rejoice at the privilege of the readers of Scripture, which leads them inevitably, from the history of a fellow-creature, to contemplate also the attributes of divine perfection. With that tender compassion, that never closed its ears to the cry of distress, except to afford relief in a more impressive manner, Jesus turned with the elders towards the centurion's house. It matters but little, whether those affectionate words, "I will come and heal him," were used now or shortly afterwards. The same spirit dictated the promise, and guided the footstep: the same tenderness, that spared no trouble when good was to be done, without hesitation promised relief, and having promised, hastened to perform. What an example is here set before us of the conduct, which we ought to pursue when a fellow-creature craves our assistance. No delay, no procrastination; all was life, and promptitude to oblige. Yet let us follow him through the

day, in which he performed this very cure. Begin with the morning, when great multitudes surrounded him from every part of the country.¹ Rejoiced at the opportunity of thus disseminating the gospel, behold him ascending the mountain and delivering that solemn and comprehensive sermon which opened his sacred ministry.² Trace him from thence descending into Caper-naum, cleansing the leper,³ visiting the centurion's servant,⁴ raising the mother of Peter's wife, who lay sick of a fever;⁵ and when the even was come, so far from seeking the repose, which the fatigues of this busy day, and the soft and solemn hour, might, we should think, have excused,—contemplate him surrounded by the wretched, and the diseased, casting out the spirits with his word, healing all that were sick, and, with a mind intent upon the great purposes of his mission, sedulously providing that the testimony, which ages before had been borne to him by the prophet, should have its complete fulfilment.⁶ Can we contemplate such a character as this, and not shrink into our-

¹ Matt. iv. 23.

² Matt. v. 1.

³ Luke vii. 1.

⁴ Matt. viii. 2, 5.

⁵ Matt. viii. 16.

⁶ Isaiah liii. 4.

selves at the thoughts of our puny philanthropy ? Oh ! that it might make a deeper impression upon us, and whilst we flee to him to intercede for our defects, that it might rouse us from the apathy that benumbs our finest feelings.

Nor let unbelief, that fatal enemy to exertion, chain down the aspirations, that flutter to soar into his presence. If we are weak in ourselves, and an impulse, foreign to our nature, is necessary to give new energy to our vacillating purposes, let us not, through any fear of being unattended to, hesitate to approach him for such assistance. We see with what ready ear he listened when on earth ; and what he was yesterday, he is to-day, and for ever : nor was he more accessible to the Jewish elders when interceding for the centurion, than now, when seated on his throne of mercy, he presents the countless sighs, that rise up before him, to the God of heaven. And whatever answer he may see fit to make to our petitions in general, there is one gift that will never be sought in vain. It is not wealth ; it is not prosperity ; but it is a gift, the gain whereof is more precious than

rubies, and all the things we can desire are not worthy to be compared unto it. Once imparted, but daily renewed, it will assimilate us more and more to him from whom it proceeds. No chemistry can equal its transforming powers ; no sword can pierce with such resistless force. What was irksome is now delightful : what was torpid is now awake : the streams of love have burst their fetters, and the bosom teems with goodness, as a watered garden. Joy and peace are its companions : the face of nature shines with new-born beauties, and every event of life is seen through an altered medium. For moroseness it infuses kindness, for roughness gentleness, for unheeding carelessness sympathy and respect. With the love of man it brings the love of God : it points to One, who, now exalted " far above all principality, and power, and might," was whilst on earth, humble, easy to be intreated, and full of mercy : it shews him still alive to our infirmities, and in the harmonious council of the divine government pleading his own sufferings in mitigation of that punishment, which would justly close the gates of heaven against sinners for ever,

Such was the gift which, though dimly discerned by himself, had been vouchsafed to the centurion, which had redeemed him from heathen bondage, and was ushering him into the faith of the gospel. It was the gift of conversion, of sanctification, and of the Holy Ghost.

But our Lord was approaching the house, and already had the centurion been informed of the honour, which he was shortly to expect. To him it was indeed an honour, not only in reality, but also in his own estimation. Others had invited the Saviour under their roof; and various had been the sentiments, with which they had entertained him: but of all, to whom he deigned bidden, or unbidden, to be a visitor, none perhaps had conceived such exalted notions of him as the centurion. He saw in him a person capable of the most miraculous achievements: he anticipated a benefactor, by whom his servant should be raised from the bed of death; and his mind was impressed with all the awe, and solemnity, that would naturally be awakened in a sensitive bosom at the approach of so illustrious a visitor. How should he address a being thus august? Should he, as some

would have done, scrupulously prepare to welcome the stranger with such honours, and ceremonial observance as his house afforded : should he exult at the compliment paid him, and plume himself with being treated with more distinction than the nobleman,¹ who, notwithstanding that he had besought Jesus to come down and heal his son, had been dismissed with a verbal assurance that he should recover ; or should he usher the physician into the sick man's room, and determine to regulate his faith by ocular investigation into his extraordinary powers ? Such were the dispositions, with which doubtless Jesus was too often regarded amongst the multiplicity of individuals, whom necessity brought to supplicate his assistance, or curiosity to observe his actions. And are there none who now receive him with similar qualifications ; none, who acknowledge his visits to be indeed an honour, but feel no lack of duty wanting, provided they wait on him with punctilious respect ? Are there none who measure themselves by other men, and presume that

¹. John iv. 46.

their own good deeds have been the meritorious cause, why they have gained an interest in his favour ? none, who value him according to their own poor experience, rather than his infinite deserts ? Come then, and let us return to the centurion : let us contemplate this man so distinguished for his virtues, this generous, benevolent, devout Roman, this foreigner for whom the Jews in a body laid aside their prejudices, this builder of synagogues, this worshipper of the God of Israel : come, and let us notice the reception which he gave to Jesus. " And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself : for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof : wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee : but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth ; and to another, Come, and he cometh ; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." What self-

¹ Luke vii. 6.

abasement, what faith, what ingenuity are here: come, let us analyze them all, and endeavour to ascertain the spirit, in which the Saviour may be most worthily approached.

If any one might be excused for indulging in the pleasing approbation of his own reflections; if the conscious recollection of a life occupied in doing good may be permitted to steal over the senses, and, although but for an hour, to deck the individual in the fancied beauty of his own merits; surely, when we consider all the circumstances connected with his history, we should say that the centurion was the man, to whom such licence might be forgiven. But could he then have bowed to Jesus worthily? Could he have felt that utter prostration of his own deserts, which pleaded nothing, advanced nothing, but submitted every thing to the mercy of his benefactor? Could he have preserved a heart so free from pride as to acknowledge that He, who, meek and unadorned with worldly pomp was approaching his dwelling, should be a being to whom nature would obey, and from whose hands it would be an honour to receive the smallest favour, which

his bounty might think fit to bestow? These were sentiments incompatible with self-applause. No boasting of past services could amalgamate with them. The good that he had done must be trusted to the registry of heaven; and as a sinful dying creature must he prostrate himself at the feet of the compassionate Jesus.

It may be observed, by the way, that this frame of mind is exhibited to us amidst scenes of affliction. It was by the dying bed of a dear friend that the centurion was enabled to maintain this submissive, yet collected conduct, and to extract from the solemn spectacle a salutary lesson. Happy, most happy is he, in whom affliction produces such effects; whose affections it can wean from a disappointing world, and fix them upon one which will abide for ever: one, which can only be contemplated with a holy heart; but which, through a gracious dispensation, supplies the devotion which it demands. Perhaps the centurion may have needed some correction; the world may have gone too smoothly with him; troops of friends may have lauded his virtues, and praise may have begun to undermine even his humility.

A blow was wanting: it was sent, and he was roused. Thrown upon himself he began to think; he saw that he was wandering, and returned: his heart was softened without being enfeebled, and bruised without being torn.

Is then the sunshine of conscience to be always excluded, and the actions, by which we may have endeavoured to glorify God, to be never called to mind? Are they only the dark epochs of our existence, which are to rise in review before us; and are those brighter moments, which filled us with such pleasure as they pass, never again to cheer our recollections, nor animate us to fresh exertion? Far be it from any one to maintain so unchristian a doctrine: if he did, the Bible would testify against him; and that holy being, whose prerogative it is to ratify the judgments of nature's tribunal, would vindicate his privilege in the bosoms of the faithful; and by the illapses of his consoling spirit would impart unutterable assurance, that there is a peace vouchsafed to the good; and that even in this world he will bestow such foretastes of bliss, as folly and superstition alone would think of rejecting. But

this is very different from calling our good deeds to remembrance in order to dwell upon them with self-complacency. Pride is the source of the one; humility the companion of the other: nor could any man, who had suffered such imaginations to find a harbour in his bosom, have acted like the centurion.

But, secondly, we are to consider this officer's faith; and as it was this that received our Lord's especial commendation, it may be profitable to inquire, first, into the nature of faith; secondly, into what extent it prevailed in the centurion, and the process by which it influenced his mind.

And, first, let us notice the extreme importance attached to faith throughout the Bible; and as it is sometimes passed over as a subject too mysterious for our understandings, or, as of minor consequence, provided the practice be good, we cannot be too anxious to ascertain how the fact stands. What then does Saint Paul say of faith? Does he pronounce it useless, or of little moment? It is true that in comparing it with charity, he gives the preference to the

latter :¹ but this evidently applies, first, to the duration of charity, which will abide when the other shall have been swallowed up in certainty ; and, secondly, to that confined sense of faith, by which the power of working miracles was principally intended. In writing to other churches less torn by schism than that of Corinth, he fully explains his views upon this important subject ; and whether those whom he addressed had wandered from the truth, or were still walking stedfastly in it, he still proposes it as the root, the groundwork, and fountain of all excellence. Thus to the Galatians, " That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident : for, the just shall live by faith."² Again, " For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision ; but faith which worketh by love."³ So to Timothy, " Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned :"⁴ as if he would say that even love, without which faith is dead, itself availeth

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

² Galatians iii. 11.

³ Gal. v. 6.

⁴ 1 Tim. i. 5.

nothing, unless springing from this its legitimate parent. In conformity with this idea of faith, he leads before us in long review the most eminent of the saints of old:¹ he recapitulates the actions, for which the life of each was most renowned; and asserts that faith, and faith alone, supplied strength to execute them. In his emphatic language he declares that "without faith it is impossible to please God;"² and at the close of his own illustrious career, when lifting up his eyes to the crown of righteousness which, he was assured, was already laid up for him, it is from this animating thought that he derives his comfort, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."³ Nor are the other apostles less earnest in their commendations. St. Peter, whom falls and trials had taught to know the heart; he, sound in judgment, admitted to the intimacy of our Lord, and long confirmed by divine inspiration, practical as he is in his doctrine, and ever insisting upon holiness of life, puts faith in a position, where, distinguished from

¹ Heb. xi.

² Ibid. xi. 6.

³ 2 Tim. iv. 7.

other virtues, it may be considered as their leader. "And besides this," he says "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge,"¹ and so forth. He does not tell them to acquire faith ; that he supposes already obtained : but as in a concert there is one performer, to whom all the others look for time, so in the graces of a Christian, faith must take the lead, and all the rest strike in with well-regulated harmony. Lastly, if further testimony is wanted, there is one to whom we may, still refer. Amidst the multitudes that sought our Lord's compassion, some for the relief of their own infirmities, some for that of their friends and neighbours ; if there was one trait of character, which he seems anxious always to draw out ; to bestow his warmest praises where he found it ; and to warn the incredulous, where he found it not, that trait is faith. "Thy faith hath saved thee." "Thy faith hath made thee whole." "O ye of little faith ;" were his almost invariable words ; and in the present instance, although he had been just informed of

¹ 2 Peter i. 5.

the centurion's beneficence, and inwardly, we may be sure, appreciated it at its highest value; yet was it his faith, which, as more exemplary than all his other good qualities, is alone held up to notice.

What then is faith, and why is this value attached to it? "Faith," says St. Paul, "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."¹ That is, it is, first, a confident expectation that the things, for which we hope, will eventually come to pass, so that we are able to realize them, and give them an actual subsistence, as if there were no more doubt of their fulfilment, than of events already accomplished. Secondly, it is such a firm belief in the testimony we possess respecting things beyond the reach of sight, that we at once acknowledge them to be true, and banish from our minds all further difficulties about them. Thus, when we look abroad upon the universe, how do we know who was its author? Has philosophy cleared up the difficulty? Have its harmonious beauty, or its unfathomable

¹ Heb. xi. 1.

mysteries brought conviction to the mind of man, that it had an allwise Creator, by whose superintending care it must still be maintained? Alas, we know what human wisdom has been able to do in establishing such a truth. But when faith steps in, and reading in the word of God, that the worlds were framed by his command, accepts the gracious communication, then do all things become plain: his divine hand is seen throughout; no perplexing questions, no vain attempts to accommodate every thing to our own notions, are allowed to unsettle us; but the understanding, free, and enlightened by a humble spirit, confesses that in no other way could a universe have originated, than from the fiat of a being as wise in planning, as he was powerful in executing the work.

And so it is with things hoped for. The same inspired pages, that tell how "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," proclaim also that, "He is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."¹

¹ Heb. xi. 6.

No human ingenuity could have ascertained that fact. Conscience might suggest, and reason might pronounce it probable, that there should be a reward for virtue: but neither the true nature of virtue, nor the manner in which God should be acceptably sought, nor even the existence of God were ever accurately determined by the wisest of men.¹ Darkness and doubt overhang their speculations; and the immortality of the soul, and its state after death, were deduced from the most fantastic arguments, or described in terms which might excite the imaginations of the learned, but could never convince the hearts of mankind in general. Faith knows none of these uncertainties; it reads the gracious declaration, "Them that honour me, I will honour;"² and

¹ Let any one peruse the first few pages of Cicero, upon the nature of the gods, and he will see the sort of opinions entertained by the ancient philosophers upon that 'most difficult and obscure question; or let him turn to the celebrated Tacitus, who, after confessing that the worship of the Jews was spiritual, and addressed to one God; that they believed him to be supreme, eternal, unchangeable, immortal, and that it was profane to make a graven image even of Cæsar, concludes by preferring the worship of Bacchus to that of Jehovah,—so low may a man's ideas sink, when he is left to himself.

² 1 Sam. ii. 30.

receives it with meek docility. Weak perhaps at first, its hopes are wavering and unsatisfactory ; reason may give its assent : but the heart is not engaged. Nevertheless it follows on : new rays of light are gradually admitted, until at length the full brightness of truth comes shining in : and doubts and fears and scruples are dispersed. It sees a God willing to forgive ; his eyes ever watching the hearts of men ; the way explained by which he must be sought ; his promises engaged, that endless happiness shall be the reward of those, who seek him after the appointed manner. Of these promises faith cannot doubt. To suppose that God will engage, yet not fulfil, is to cast a slur upon his truth, and to destroy his attributes. Faith therefore sees the reward already present : she takes the golden crown, as if even now held forth to her acceptance ; she trembles only at her own unworthiness, and knows no other fear than that she should fall short of her part of the covenant. Thus begins a new existence : joyful obedience, exulting gratitude, holy peace. A heart never tired, a love never satisfied, heaven commencing ere earth be ended :

and in the person of the humble, but now exalted Jesus, " wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,"¹ acknowledged and adored.

Such is a faint representation of the nature and value of faith, and such were the feelings which occupied the bosom of the centurion. Much that has since been declared to us, was necessarily unknown to him: but so far as the revelation of his day permitted, his heart glowed with the best affections of a true faith. Having accustomed himself, (and what more lovely object could engage any man,) to contemplate the perfections of the Saviour, he felt satisfied that none could do the things which he did, unless he were divine. In vain did Jesus appear before him accompanied by his humble followers. In vain did the whole city of Capernaum turn a deaf, perhaps a contemptuous, ear to the most gracious words that ever fell from man. The centurion formed his own opinion; and having through the native honesty of an unprejudiced heart become convinced of

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

the truth, he at once, with the frankness of a soldier, and the boldness of a Christian, avowed it.

And what prevents any of us from enjoying the same assurance? Do we suppose that he, who is entered into heaven, can be less touched with the feeling of our infirmities, than in those days of his humiliation, when he was in all points tempted like as we are? Rather let us confess, that it is sin indulged which grieves that Holy Spirit, from whom alone faith originates; that when he is ready to pour into our hearts his best illuminations, some obstinate perverseness of our own sees more delight in carnal self-will, than in the purifying reception, with which alone he can be satisfied. Let us confess that it is pride in some shape or another, which revolts against the easy yoke which all, who come to Jesus, must love to bear: pride of knowledge, pride of our own merits, pride of the praise of men rather than of God. Let us confess that we are slothful; that to contemplate things unseen requires an effort; and that so long as we can busy ourselves with any trifle that the passing moment brings forth,

we gladly turn away from serious meditation. Yet if any subject can repay an hour of contemplative abstraction, if any reflections may hope to be blessed with a gracious influence, it surely is, when faith withdraws herself from the world, and soars aloft to those unspotted regions, where the Redeemer of mankind loves to receive the prayers and adoration of his elect. At that still and pensive hour, for instance, which the wisest of men have, like Isaac, dedicated to similar services; when the shadows of evening have closed around them, and the stars have one by one marshalled their array throughout the firmament, whilst the breezes whisper their solemn music, and even nature appears to summon us to think; then it may be sweet to collect our wandering imaginations, and instead of the unprofitable reveries which fancy would suggest, to fix our minds upon the truths which our Bibles have taught us. Who can tell what precious communion may be thus vouchsafed to him: what positive convictions he may receive upon subjects, of which he has often read, but over the spiritual understanding of which an impene-

trable veil has hitherto been spread: who can tell but that his faith may be awakened, satisfied, confirmed: taught to sigh, and not in vain, for a closer walk with him, who has become his all-sufficient Saviour, and whose infinite perfections fill him with wonder and with love? This is no visionary inquiry. We believe it to have been the experience of many: happy, thrice happy are they, who retain the gracious impression, and act upon it through life.

But we are now to consider how intimately the faith of the centurion mingled with his worldly occupation; and with what ingenuity it availed itself of the pursuits of ordinary life, to illustrate the noblest truths of religion. "Speak the word only," said this devout officer, "and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers; and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it:" as if he would have said, If I, who am but a centurion, subject to the orders of my tribune, and obliged to conform in every respect to what

he directs, if I have such power over my soldiers, that I have but to express my wishes, and am instantly obeyed: how infinitely rather shall one, who by his miracles has proved himself to be gifted with absolute, nay, divine authority, need only to issue his commands, and the sick man shall be healed as effectually, as if his deliverer were actually on the spot. It was impossible for words to express more forcibly his high opinion of the power of Christ. They avowed him Lord of nature: they endowed him with virtue which could only belong to divinity, and confessed that, under the garb of man, he was, if not actually directing the dispensations of providence, at least possessed of the prerogative and capability of doing so. And yet these emphatic expressions were but the application of the common affairs of life to the subject uppermost in his mind. The same reflections upon the authority of a military man over his inferiors must have frequently struck any one of the centurions belonging to the garrison of Capernaum: and had they been gifted with the same devout spirit, there was nothing abstruse in the idea, which need have prevented

them from drawing as excellent an inference from it. And such is the case with every occupation. It is not the army alone that furnishes holy illustrations. High as the profession of a religious soldier may be, yet it would be absurd to affirm, that he only was privileged to extract spiritual benefit from his worldly duties. Every calling, every pursuit teems with images applicable to him, who is the head of all things.

There is one more remark which we feel desirous to offer upon the conduct of the centurion, and it arises from the simple expression, "Lord, trouble not thyself." Having already dwelt upon his assent to the divinity of Jesus, we shall do no more than point to the emphatic title "Lord," here applied to him: but allowing for the deference which it would necessarily command, we cannot help adverting to the courtesy, which in common with his brother officers, this good man seems to have cultivated. It is a virtue of so amiable a nature, so calculated to promote the comfort of others, so necessary, in order to exhibit religion in its genuine beauty, that it cannot be too

often recommended, especially to those who are much occupied with the world. For our own part, we have no doubt that the same courteous disposition, which now mingled with the centurion's faith, distinguished him on all occasions ; nor do we believe that the building of a synagogue would have so won the affections of the Jews, had he not adorned his beneficence by a kind, obliging manner.

Such then was the person, so humble, benevolent, and devout, who now, as Jesus approached the house, presented himself in person before him. The utmost, probably, which he expected, was that his prayer would be graciously listened to, and that our Lord, with his usual compassion, would restore the servant to health. That there was any thing in his own character particularly deserving of commendation, we may be sure never occurred to him. He thought not of the favours which he had bestowed upon Capernaum, nor would the faith, of which he was giving such illustrious evidence, appear any thing in his own eyes : but as he knelt before the gracious being, from whom he expected a miracle, he would feel his

own unworthiness, and consider the smallest favour granted to his petition an act of gratuitous mercy.

But it never was the nature of our Lord to permit such genuine piety to pass unrewarded ; and the prayer of the centurion, like Solomon's when he desired wisdom, was now to return upon him with tenfold increase. For the narrative continues ; “ When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and said unto the people that followed, “ Verily, I say unto you. I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It would be vain to describe the feelings of the centurion at this moment. To be approved by one, whose praise was beyond all value ; to behold the eye of that beloved personage gazing on him with wonder, and to hear himself publicly pronounced the most perfect model of faith that he had met with, must have been so

unexpected, yet so grateful, as to fill the heart of the Roman with emotions that can only be felt.

It was said that Jesus marvelled: and he is on one other occasion represented as expressing the same astonishment.¹ But how different were the causes of his emotion. In one instance he was musing upon the unbelief of his own townspeople: in the other, he was contemplating a man, who, though born a gentile, and bred up in a camp, had nevertheless attained a degree of faith unparalleled in Israel. How forcibly, then, does our Lord set forth the value of faith by these two expressions of wonder, which embracing the whole range of belief from the most undoubting conviction to the blindest incredulity, exhibit the two extremes in colours as vivid as they are contrasted. If Jesus marvelled at the obstinate Jews, and marvelled also at the docile centurion, it was clear that no conception of his greatness could exceed the reality, and that his judgment of men hinged upon their readiness to believe in him.

¹ Matt. vi. 6.

But there was a promise contained in our Lord's address. "Many shall come from the east, and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." It is an interesting fact, that this prediction of the gathering of the gentiles to the gospel, which was first vouchsafed to a soldier, received also its accomplishment in the person of a soldier. The centurion's faith drew forth the promise; and the devotion of another centurion, whose history will close our humble inquiries, was, twelve years afterwards, rewarded in being made the first-fruits of its completion. What was there in these Roman officers to be so highly honoured? Why were they selected to lead the advance of the countless multitudes, who have been, and shall be rescued from the depths of darkness, and made more than conquerors through him that loved them? It was divine grace which sought them out; and their manly independence which made them boldly to confess their devout impressions. Nor can we suppose that they met with less respect on that account in the army. Had they been ashamed of their religion, they

might soon have dwindled into common-place characters ; but by steadily persevering in it, they would gain the reputation of sincerity ; and the world never long refuses to do justice to such consistent conduct.

How then are soldiers, or rather, how are all Christians now-a-days affected by this portion of the history ; and what does the promise made to the centurion, enjoin them to do ? Certainly, we should say, to identify themselves with the necessities of the unconverted in all parts of the world :¹ first, like the Macedonians of old, to give themselves unto God, and then to cooperate in extending the gospel whithersoever duty may call them. When an officer leads the way into battle, he summons all, laggard or brave, to follow him. Let every one wage his Christian warfare in like manner ; let him impart his spirit to the lingering, communicate knowledge to the ignorant, and encourage the zealous and the faithful in the way they should go. There was an era in European history, when to propagate the religion of the cross was esteemed the highest honour

¹ 1 Cor. viii. 5.

of the bravest men.¹ The enthusiasm by which they were impelled, may have been often ill regulated, but in numerous instances it was sincere : and when the warrior left his native land to reconquer the spot where his Saviour died, and to impart to others the faith, whose symbol it was his pride to wear, whatever we may think of the prudence with which his object was pursued, at all events we must venerate the spirit which endeared it.

Nor was there any very great difference between the virtuous crusader, and our centurion. It is true that the one was living in comparative peace : the element of the other was danger in all its varieties. Yet the fountain of the heart was the same ; the waters, that welled up in each, were identical in property ; it was but the channel, which they found for their overflowing, that made the aspect of life to differ. The love of Christ was the mainspring of both. This led the Roman to acknowledge his divinity ;

¹ Even Loyola challenges a certain respect. Had the zeal of this founder of the Jesuits been engaged in a purer cause ; we might contrast it with our own labours ; and perhaps acknowledge that we should be more useful, if we approached it nearer.

this induced the crusader to sacrifice everything in his service. Dissimilar as was their career, the object was the same: and whether the one traversed the ocean, and braved the perils of a holy war; or the other expended his wealth in facilitating the worship of God; it was piety that animated both, and the desire of communicating in the most effectual way the good, which they had received. And thus, though circumstances alter, should the spirit still prevail. Though no man will be again called upon to acknowledge in an uncrucified Redeemer the Son of God; nor any one perhaps be summoned to redeem Jerusalem by force of arms; yet the Saviour remains the same; the affections which he challenges will never vary; nor, whilst men live in society, will there be wanting opportunities for turning those affections to account. Till that glorious time, when heathen darkness shall have been swept away, and all the earth shall glow with evangelical brightness, love will search out ways for spreading its influence: and whether sin is to be combated amongst those, with whom we live, or to be invaded in distant lands, the man, whose faith is sincere,

will always discover a field for extending his Lord's dominion.¹

But Jesus had delivered his prophecy. With the solemnity of one, who knew that he was speaking from authority, he had pronounced blessings upon the believing Gentiles, and woes unutterable upon the Jews who rejected his Gospel. He now turned to the centurion. His countenance beamed with approbation; and his regards, like the look which he gave to Peter, would leave an impression on the soldier never to be effaced. "Go thy way," said he, "and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." As if he had thus expressed himself:—"Depart in peace, go back to your house, and follow your usual avocations. Continue to do your duty, and persevere in the good works, in which you have hitherto abounded. We may meet but little more in this world, at least to your visible apprehension; but hold fast the

¹ When we contemplate the state of the world, or even of our own possessions; and consider the millions subject to the British crown, who still remain to be Christianized; to say nothing of those, whose Christianity is scarcely more enlightened than heathenism, it seems needless to hint at the possibility of finding a field for exertion.

confession which you have just made, and the hour will come, when you shall behold me far different to what I now appear. Remember this interview. I am now going to perform the cure which you have sought, in a manner that shall confirm your faith ; and as you have believed me endued with power to work this miracle, therefore according to the expectation which you have formed, so shall it be brought to pass. Farewell ! ” Such may be a brief exposition of our Lord’s reply ; and we may conceive the feelings of the centurion, as bending low before his divine benefactor, he listened to the gracious words, which proceeded from his mouth. Joy for the recovery of his servant, admiration of the tender sympathy with which his petition had been granted, the gentle whispers of an approving conscience, with the humbling, but not painful sense of personal unworthiness ; a holy resolution to abide stedfast in the faith, and an animating anticipation of a life devoted to its duties : these would pass in grateful succession through a bosom, now filled with an absorbing sentiment of love to Jesus, now expanding into charity for all mankind.

Thus would he bend his steps homewards. The first sight that met his eye, would be the servant glowing with health, and anxiously waiting to inform his master of his wonderful recovery. Amidst their tender congratulations, the question would naturally be asked, when did the disorder leave him, and in what manner did it depart: and the answer would point to the self-same hour, in which Jesus spoke the words, "So be it done unto thee." At that moment virtue entered his frame, the fainting spirit revived, and the body, fast sinking to the grave, sprung, as in a supernatural crisis, to energy and life. It was indeed a marvellous coincidence; nor could any thing farther be required to complete the conviction, which the miracles and character of our Lord had already begun.

We have before ventured to picture to ourselves the effects, which the wonderful events that they witnessed, would have upon the subsequent career of these Roman officers: nor will it be any great effort of imagination to sketch a few of the principal traits, which would be likely to distinguish the centurion.

First, he would persevere in a consistent adherence to the faith of Christ. That divine influence, which led him to declare his assurance of our Lord's omnipotence, would mingle with every sentiment, awakening his gratitude, giving a cast to his character, and an impulse to his actions. The fond recollection of the Saviour's kindness would be the subject of his sweetest reflexions; to collect, and commit his sayings to memory, his most pleasing employment. When scarcely three years afterwards the sad intelligence should reach Capernaum, that this same Jesus had been betrayed by one of his own disciples, and crucified as a common malefactor, shame and sorrow would fill his bosom: but when it should be added, that, having expired on the cross, he had risen from the grave, and triumphed over death, and hell, few hearts would beat with more exulting joy.

And as it is the privilege of such sentiments to influence every part of a man's conduct, and to lead him on to general perfection, it may be inferred that he would, as a rule of life, pursue whatsoever was lovely, and of good report. Thus the duties of his station would be assidu-

ously attended to. To his brother officers he would be a valued counsellor, generous, and obliging. To his soldiers he would continue, as the history leads us to conclude that he always had been, a benevolent, impartial commander; enquiring into their wants, solicitous for their welfare, and considering himself the responsible guardian of their highest interests. To the people of the country where he might be stationed, he would persevere in the same course of disinterested beneficence, which had marked his intercourse with those of Judæa; studying the frame of society, and inquiring into its resources, in order to bring them forward, and into its necessities, in order to relieve them. The time not required for military exercises, he would employ in improving his understanding, and storing his mind with knowledge. Satisfied that the more the wonders of nature are made known, the greater will be the benefit to mankind, and the honour to the Creator, he would perhaps vary his occupations by exploring the treasures, with which providence had adorned the spot upon which his duty had fixed him. But above all he would watch over

its spiritual interests; and as he had built a synagogue for the Israelites, so would he facilitate the propagation of a religion, not only more pure, but endeared to him by so many memorable circumstances.

Such is an imperfect outline of the character which we may conceive that the centurion would maintain through the remainder of his earthly service. Happy in himself, and in the respect of all around him, he would be a valuable servant to his emperor, endeared to the colony, an honour to the army, and an example to the world. Amidst the complicated tissue of life, his work would be even and uniform, so that action would blend into action with harmonious loveliness, and all things work together for his good. And as his ways would be ways of pleasantness, so would his prospects shine without a cloud, and his end be perfect peace. Welcomed by the Saviour, whom he had confessed on earth, his happy spirit would soar aloft to receive at the throne of heaven that Saviour's approbation. There, surrounded by the angelic armies, and hailed by the multitudes who, like himself had washed their robes and

made them white in the blood of the Lamb, he would hear the glorious words, “ Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

CHAPTER V.

THE CENTURION CORNELIUS.

Acts x. 1. to xi. 18.

Introduction—Character of Cornelius—Who the most remarkable for maintaining religious order in their families—The vision of Cornelius—His reception of the angel—The minutest events taken cognizance of by God—Cornelius dispatches messengers to Peter—Peter goes to the housetop to pray—His trance—Testimony borne by the messengers to the character of Cornelius—Peter returns with them to Cesarea—Cornelius is expecting him—Relates his vision, and the cause for which he was sent to Joppa—Peter's discourse—Its consequences—The Holy Ghost descends upon Cornelius and his friends—His subsequent career.

WE now approach the history of one of the most remarkable of the numerous interesting characters which abound in holy writ. It is a subject which has employed the pens of many; nor does the writer of these pages affect to offer

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Ten years had now elapsed since the promise was made to the centurion at Capernaum that "many should come from the east and west, and should sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;" that is, should, in the first place, be admitted to a knowledge of Christianity, and, eventually, to a participation of its rewards in the abodes of the blessed. Since the delivery of that gracious prediction, Jesus had finished his earthly ministry, and reascended into the heaven, from whence love to our fallen race had brought him down. His disciples, with varied success, had entered upon his labours, still however confining themselves to the Jews, and doubting whether it were not profane even to be seen in company

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remarks, which may not have been anticipated by those, who have gone before him. Yet the piety of the individual, the miraculous events connected with his admission to the gospel, and the vast results, of which he was made the honoured forerunner, are of themselves so striking, that the most obvious reflections, such as would suggest themselves to any one, may hope to meet with some degree of sympathy.

Ten years had now elapsed since the promise was made to the centurion at Capernaum that “many should come from the east and west, and should sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;” that is, should, in the first place, be admitted to a knowledge of Christianity, and, eventually, to a participation of its rewards in the abodes of the blessed. Since the delivery of that gracious prediction, Jesus had finished his earthly ministry, and reascended into the heaven, from whence love to our fallen race had brought him down. His disciples, with varied success, had entered upon his labours, still however confining themselves to the Jews, and doubting whether it were not profane even to be seen in company

with an uncircumcised gentile. But the hour had arrived when these prejudices were to cease, when they should learn that their Lord did not leave his throne of glory merely to enlighten one small exclusive nation ; but that the gospel, hitherto offered only to Jews and Samaritans, was destined to spread its influence to the remotest regions of the globe. To break down this barrier, to overstep the line, which for more than fifteen hundred years had separated the descendants of Abraham from the rest of the world, and to commence the fulfilment of those great events, which had inspired prophet after prophet with the sublimest imaginations, was a work too important, and pregnant with changes too deeply affecting mankind, to be allowed to excite our curiosity in vain. The history of the first Gentile convert has therefore not been past over in silence. His character has been drawn in a brief but expressive outline ; and, whilst we contemplate it, we may learn who it is that God delights to honour ; and by what conduct others may hope to be led, like Cornelius, into all truth.

“ There was,” says the historian, “ a certain

man in Cæsarea, called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."

Cæsarea, the scene of the following events, was a town of importance in Judæa. It had been improved and beautified by Herod the great, and, as we have seen in the history of Lysias, was the residence of the Roman governor. The regiment, now stationed there, is supposed to have consisted chiefly of Italians, and thence to have been denominated the Italian band;¹ and Cornelius is thought to have

¹ Many, with Grotius, have explained this, as if the meaning were, that Cornelius was a centurion of one of the cohorts belonging to the Italian legion. . . . But I refer the reader to the many learned and judicious things, which Mr. Biscoe has said (Boyle's Lectures) to shew that the Italian legion did not exist at this time. . . . I think it exceedingly probable, for the reasons which he urges, that this was a cohort different from any of the legionary ones; and consequently that Luke has here expressed himself with his usual accuracy; and that the mistake lies, as it generally does, in those who think they have learning enough to correct him. It is probable that this was called the Italian cohort, because most of the soldiers belonging to it were Italians—Doddridge. Instead of *generally*, *always* would have been more proper.—*Notes to Scott's Bible*, Acts x. 1.

been related to the family of that name, one of the most illustrious of Rome. It is not, however, with his high connections that we have to do. His noble birth, though undoubtedly entitled to respect, would have availed but little to transmit his character to posterity: and although some are weak enough to regard it as an equivalent for many defects; yet we may be sure that Cornelius, if he ever thought upon the subject, would see it in a far different light, and, like the Greek of old, consider true honour to consist, not in a long descent, but in honourable actions.

He was, however, a devout man. This is a favourite expression of St. Luke's, and implies that allegiance of the heart which first inclines a man to acquaint himself with the true way of obedience, and then attaches him with undivided loyalty to its practice. It were little to say that such an one is incapable of an irreverent thought, for his whole heart is filled with love and awe. His devotion is a living principle. In its most abstracted meditations it is bringing fruit to perfection; and though it loves to ponder on the ways of Providence, and

often withdraws from the world to do so ; yet it uses these moments of retirement but as refreshments, and returns with renewed zeal to active piety. If we have met with such a person, and we would hope that all can number one among their friends, let the pleasing remembrance of his beloved society picture to us what the character is. How have we hung upon his words ; and in the sweet communion of his head-taught thoughts have felt our knowledge matured, and every grace invigorated. How loosely have we seen the world and its cares hang upon him ; each passing regret absorbed in resignation, and every action shewing that his faith was fixed upon that glorious moment, when he should depart in peace, and enter on his rest. Such perhaps was Simeon, when waiting for the consolation of Israel :¹ such this devout centurion. Though born a Gentile, he had become acquainted with God ; and was faithfully serving him to the best of his ability, and with all his heart.

But his holiness was not merely personal, it

¹ Luke ii. 25.

extended over his whole family. “ He feared God with all his house ;” and it is a proof of the excellence of his disposition, that he was able to form a circle thus united. We know not whether he selected domestics of opinions similar to his own ; or whether the beauty of his instructions and example won them over ; but we may conclude that he was made the means of converting some, and that all beneath his roof were strengthened by his influence. And a happy home must that have been, whose inmates were thus living under an abiding sense of godly fear. No furious passions, nor sullen coldness clouded its serenity : love was the presiding spirit ; and every member of the group concurred in revering him, whom Providence had appointed to be their master and guide.

And here let us confess who they are that shine the most conspicuously in Scripture for maintaining this religious order in their families. We might suppose they would be men, whose days glided away in peace, and who never stepped beyond the sphere of private life, nor risqued their self-possession in a public station. Yet this was not the case. They were men of

war; soldiers whose early youth was nursed in battles, and whose advancing years still found them occupied in commanding armies, and conducting campaigns. It was Joshua, the gallant conqueror of the promised land, who cried, “As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.”¹ It was David the king, and warrior, who, from the day in which he slew the giant, became a mighty person, that said, “Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.”² And it is now Cornelius the centurion of a heathen legion, exposed to all the dangers of a soldier’s career, that trains his family in the way of holiness, and “fears God with all his house.”

But Cornelius did not confine his piety to the offices of devotion, nor to the edification of his own family; but as his love to God was fervent, so he evinced it by active, liberal benevolence to all within his reach—“He gave much alms to the people:” not, be it remembered, to necessitous Romans, who might have urged

¹ Joshua xxiv. 15.

² Psalm ci. 6.

their claims upon his charity, as belonging to his own country, and connected by the various ties, that soften the members of the same community into mutual sympathy; but to the poor and needy Jews, men not sprung from the same origin, whose language perhaps he had difficulty in understanding, who had for years been the turbulent opposers of the government of his emperor, and who therefore had no claim upon his compassion, except as the inhabitants of the province to which his duty had conducted him, and as the children of want and woe. And doubtless such a claim would have gone far with Cornelius; doubtless he melted at the sight of misery, and had a hand ever ready to execute what pity suggested. Nevertheless these amiable feelings were not sufficient to ensure the liberality which he is said to have practised. There must have been a higher motive; and we believe that, whilst, like the centurion at Capernaum, he recognized in the Jews the chosen people, he would also find his liveliest incentives to do good in the sacred volume, of which they were the guardians.

But Cornelius was also a man of prayer.

“ He prayed to God always ; ” and the meaning, as we apprehend, of the expression is, that prayer was constantly suggesting itself to his mind ; and that he was as constantly ready to entertain and offer it up. There can be no question whether a man like him was regular at public worship ; or whether he collected his household around him to offer the morning and evening sacrifice of family praise. All this is implied in the character already given ; but we now find that he was equally strict in private devotion, and, like the sentinel charged with an important post, watched to it with all perseverance. The spirit of supplication was always present with him, prompting him, whether in solitude or in company, to seek the favour of God. Often would he retire to his chamber, and, like Daniel,¹ kneel upon his knees, and pray, and give thanks before God ; often, like Nehemiah,² would he pause in the hurry of business, and in short and silent ejaculations, implore protection, and advice from the giver of all wisdom. Thus would he maintain an habitual communion with

¹ Daniel vi. 10.

² Nehemiah ii. 4.

his maker, and as he never resisted those divine impulses, he would be rewarded with the full benefit of their assistance.

In such a bosom as we have thus described to us, no unholy dispositions could find a resting place, nor any uncharitable thoughts injure a fellow creature. Composed, and collected, and invariably disposed to do the thing that is right, the individual would reap inestimable advantages in the intercourse of life. The hearts of others would expand to him. The eye, that beamed with kindness, would be cheered in its turn with looks of reciprocal regard ; and the gentleness that emanated from the source of all good, might trust to meet from others with sympathy and concurrence. If, as is the lot of all, some should be found hostile towards him, his revenge would be to pray for them ; and the prayer that could invoke blessings on an enemy, would return, like the dew, into his bosom ; even if it was not permitted to disarm resentment and to convert a foe into a friend. His understanding would be clear, his judgment unclouded by prejudice, his passions bridled, his affections free ; for the man, that will exercise himself in habi-

tual aspirations for divine assistance, has learned the secret of poizing all things in the balance of propriety, and bringing forth every fruit in its due season.

Such we conceive to have been the character of Cornelius, "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."

"He saw in a vision evidently, about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." A solemn moment was this to Cornelius. As the ninth hour of the day was the time of the evening sacrifice, devout people were accustomed to observe it with prayer: and it will appear afterwards that he was now engaged in his devotions, and, as it would seem from the ad-

dress of the angel, imploring instruction upon subjects, which at once interested and perplexed his mind. Converted to the Jewish faith, but free from Jewish prejudice, he had studied with an anxious eye the writings of the Hebrew prophets. All therein contained respecting godliness he understood ; and, as far as in him lay, put in practice. But there were promises of some great One that was to come ; intimations of a new way in which God was to be sought, and shadowings of some mighty change, which should abolish the rites that had subsisted since the days of Moses, and introduce a better dispensation. That change had now arrived. That wondrous one had appeared on earth : the veil of the temple had been rent ; and a crucified Saviour had been preached throughout all Judea. Cornelius had doubtless heard of these things ; for the evangelist Philip had resided at Cæsarea since the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch ; and the numbers of the followers of Jesus were too notorious to be overlooked by a Roman centurion. Had then he, that was to come, indeed appeared ? Was Christ, the crucified one, in truth Messiah ? Was

the worship of the temple to be given up, baptism to supersede circumcision, and the Gentile to be favoured with higher privileges, and a more spiritual religion than the Israelite had ever enjoyed? If so, how should Cornelius avail himself of these gracious promises? To whom should he apply for instruction? What steps should he take to be admitted amongst the few, who were seeking salvation aright?

Such may have been the current of Cornelius's thoughts, and it pleased God remarkably to exemplify in him that "his eyes are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers."¹ Knowing his sincerity, and beholding in him a heart ready to receive the truth, he determined to reveal it in a manner, that should mark an approval of his piety, and at the same time do homage to the revolution, which was about to take place. Strong as are the impressions which the Holy Spirit sometimes makes upon man: yet a more striking and solemn communication was deemed necessary on this occasion. An angel of God was to appear, not in a trance, whose meaning it

¹ Psalm xxxiv. 15.

might be difficult to determine ; but evidently, in his own effulgent person, the representative of the mercy and majesty of the Most High. With what delight would that holy creature cleave the air, and wing his way from heaven to minister to this chosen vessel ! Yet thus, we are told, do these celestial messengers still wait to carry the commands of their Lord,¹ and to execute his designs of love to such as faithfully serve him. Who can tell that an angel is not now at his side ; pure, as he is glorious : holy, as he is sublime ; a beholder of his most secret actions, a hearer of his lowest whisper ? Who can imagine such a companion without blushing to think of the contrast that might be too often drawn between them ; or without an aspiration after a nearer resemblance ?

But the angel had entered the room : and, as the centurion gazed upon him, he heard his celestial visitor call him by name, Cornelius. There was doubtless something very touching in the tone, with which that single word was uttered ; and the whole appearance of the

¹ Heb. i. 14.

vision filled him with astonishment. But let us observe his answer ; and when any one is favoured, not indeed with a miraculous vision, but with those divine suggestions, which emanate from the same holy source, let him learn from this reception of the angel, how he may most worthily avail himself of them. “ What is it, Lord ? ” was the devout reply. “ Why dost thou deign to visit a poor sinful Gentile ? What is thy will ? Behold me ready to fulfil it to the best of my humble abilities.” It was the homage of a lowly spirit, of such a spirit as prompted Samuel to say, “ Speak, for thy servant heareth,” or Mary to express her humble acquiescence, “ Be it unto me according to thy word.” ¹ And as the enquiry was becoming, so was the answer gracious which the angel made. “ Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter : he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side : he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.” The introduction, as

¹ Luke i. 38.

expressed in our translation, would be especially adapted to touch the heart of a soldier. When military men have a favour to beg of their superior, the custom is to address him with a sort of petition, in which their services are set forth as the plea, upon which they ground their application. This is called a memorial ; and when offered in a proper spirit, it is always entitled to, and generally obtains attention. It is true that Cornelius had never pleaded his alms and prayers as any claim for reward ; yet when the memorial is mentioned, we recognize his imperfect duties recapitulated, and placed under the eye of an approving Judge. Can we doubt to whom he was indebted,—*who* pleaded, and presented him before the throne of God as the chosen instrument for introducing his redeeming love to the Gentile world,—*who* now retraced his services with a memory, from which none would be obliterated, and was at once the memorialist, the judge, and the rewarder ?

And as he opened the way through this Roman officer, so does he continue it towards all, who like him, are enquiring after truth. Prayers and alms humbly offered brought the

Saviour to Cornelius. Prayers and alms may still hope to co-operate with other graces in procuring the same favour for those, who long to believe, but have not yet obtained that happy privilege.¹ Let them but persevere ; and the time will come when the door shall be thrown open to their entreaties ; and they shall tread with joy, the firm and solid ground of genuine faith.²

“ And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter.” Philip the evangelist was at this time residing at Cæsarea ; and the centurion might have been referred to him, but it had been foretold that Peter should found the church ; and it was calculated to give more confidence to Cornelius, if one so honoured, and admitted to the intimacy of our Lord, should be sent to instruct him. To Peter, therefore, he was directed to apply : and, in abstaining from the communication of the revelation out of his own mouth, the angel has encouraged all, when first admitted upon the threshold of faith, thankfully

¹ John xiv. 15.

² Luke xi. 8.

to embrace an opportunity of consulting some experienced christian. It was a special favour shewn to Saul of Tarsus, that Ananias was directed to visit him; and it is a mercy which all, when first awakened, should pray for, not to be left to themselves, nor to the counsels of the world; but to be led to some devout friend, who will confirm their struggling resolutions, and bring the full light of mature piety to preserve them from wandering again out of the narrow path.

But the vision was ended: the angel had departed, and Cornelius was left to his own reflections. It would be vain to attempt an analysis of his feelings. Wonder, joy, and adoration would keep him suspended for awhile. With eyes fixed, and soul entranced, he would gaze on the spot, from which the angelic form had vanished: then fall with reverence on his knees, imploring strength, and judgment to direct him in whatever path he might be destined to walk. But the centurion's was an active piety. His military feelings,—for the daily habits of a man will influence all his character,—would incline him to prompt obedience:

his heart would yearn to impart the glorious vision to those who were to share in its benefits: and the certainty that he was about to have his doubts explained, and the way of life made clear, would stimulate him to carry into effect without delay, the commands which he had received. Happy Cornelius! the object of whose wishes was of such a nature, that the more earnestly he longed for their gratification, the more entirely was he fulfilling the will of his divine instructor. "And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa." Here was no indecision: no postponing till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day: no questioning as to the probability that a stranger residing at a distance, should be able to elucidate the mysteries that perplexed his mind. He stopped but to select a soldier of sentiments congenial to his own: then having related the wonders that he had witnessed, he dispatched the messengers without loss of time, upon their errand.

And now who shall say, that had an angel so radiant appeared to him, he would have paid the same quiet, straightforward obedience, as did Cornelius? Each perhaps thinks that he should: and many may sigh for an opportunity, when their faith shall be tested by an appeal seemingly so irresistible. Yet nothing is more true, than that to trust like Cornelius, we must first live like him. When the jailor at Philippi heard the earthquake, he also enquired what he must do to be saved,¹ but it was in a paroxysm of fear that he rushed into the dungeon where Paul and Silas were confined, and asked the agonizing question. His mind was a wilderness, that of Cornelius a watered garden: and, to say nothing of the comparative probability of perseverance, who would hesitate whether to be roused to repentance by the terrors of the Lord, or confirmed in holiness by his mercy? Would we then enjoy the serenity of Cornelius, let us improve our opportunities in the same degree. Few were his in comparison. The law of Moses, the Psalms of David,

¹ Acts xvi. 26.

the history of Israel, and the prophets, were the Scriptures, to which he had access. There were no Gospels, no Epistles, no records of the apostle's labours, none of his own conversion. These have been added for us to profit by; and should we be tempted to think that, were an angel to visit us, we should then believe in earnest, let us remember him, who assures us, that unless we attend even to the testimony which Cornelius enjoyed, far more to that of our own dispensation, no miraculous vision, however solemn, would make an impression on us.

Cornelius had a numerous establishment. "He called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of those who waited on him continually." Thus he had many dependents, and enjoyed an affluent fortune; but it does not appear that he was married, and he probably led this exemplary life as a single man. Be that as it may, his comforts were no snare to him; for he had learned to turn them to good account, and to use the influence they gave him, in countenancing godly people. Many a one similarly circumstanced, well born,

rich, and of a certain military rank, would have yielded to the suggestions of a worldly mind, and followed some other path, perhaps that of ambition, as most appropriate to a manly character. It needs but a glance at society to determine which would have been the happiest, in all probability the most prosperous. Here and there we find one, who has battled his way to eminence; but if we knew the histories of half of those, whom sad disappointment has checked in their career, every feeling of the heart would concur in pronouncing that Cornelius was the wisest man, and that he, who makes his own advancement the first object, is a fool in comparison to him, who considers every step upon the ladder only as an additional advantage in watching over the best interests of himself and others.

But we left the favoured party on their road to Joppa. As they went, they would naturally discourse upon the things just made known to them, as well as upon those, which had long been their favourite theme: the goodness of God, the holy character of their master, and the miraculous vision. Gratified by the confidence

reposed in them, in being selected for this interesting duty ; their hearts would expand with a warmer affection, and their devotions assume a deeper cast. Every object would take its hue from the disposition of the mind. The woods and the vallies would smile with gentler beauties ; the distant ocean wear a richer blue ; the towers of Joppa would rise above the waves with an interest hitherto unfelt ; and every passing traveller would seem a brother, and be greeted with the salutation of good-will.

In the meanwhile, preparations were making for their reception at the tanner's house. "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray." The apostle's retirement to this tranquil spot, although he may have frequently resorted thither during his abode at Joppa, seems on this occasion to have been divinely ordered. Elevated above the noise and bustle of the world, and looking down upon the lovely scenery with which that city is said to have been surrounded, he would be more enlarged in prayer, and more alive to the impressions which it was intended he should re-

ceive before the arrival of the messengers. Whilst he was thus engaged, it pleased God to make use of his animal appetites for the communication of the divine will; for it is said, "He became very hungry, and would have eaten. But while they made ready, he fell into a trance; and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." Although our business is with the character of Cornelius, yet it can hardly be inconsistent with that plan, briefly to dwell upon this striking description. How marvellous are the operations of the Holy Spirit! Who would have imagined, when the cravings of hunger first seized Peter, that he was through them about to receive a revelation, which should obliterate the impressions of a life, and influence the religion of the world? Yet it came; and in a way that shewed how God can vary his methods of instruction, and

clothe them with that picturesque effect which shall rivet every thought of the heart. What then have we to do, but to welcome such gracious communications, and to cultivate a frame of mind suitable for their improvement. They may come vividly, as for instance in a passage of scripture suddenly brought to the recollection, and bearing forcibly upon the subject that occupies us ; or they may steal over us gently, as in the conversation of a holy friend. But in whatever manner they may be vouchsafed, the more humble the disposition is, the more nicely will they be understood ; and the purer the heart, the more honourably will they be obeyed.

The great sheet seems evidently an emblem of the Christian church. Descending from heaven, and approaching towards the apostle, it set forth its divine origin, as well as its desire to invite, and make advances to mankind. Carefully closed at the corners, we see its compactness, and capacity ; its fitness to receive, as well as solicitude that none, once admitted, should again be lost. Had it been left open, or only loosely fastened, it might have argued a want of precaution on the part of its divine

preparer: but being firmly knit, an operation implying pains and trouble, it leads us to admire the parental love, which thus takes care of all its children.

In "the four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air," are aptly represented the various nations of the globe, and the countless dispositions of mankind. Civilized or savage; buried amidst the gloom of perennial snow, or glowing in the fervour of unclouded sunshine; gentle or wild; dull or intellectual; high or low; all are alike admissible into the fold of Christ. And as the command was to the apostle, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat;" so it still continues to every one of us. To win over the unconverted to the gospel, should be grateful as our daily food. It was so to Christ. "I have meat to eat," said he to his wondering disciples, "that ye know not of,"¹ and that meat had been to offer the blessings of eternal life to a poor sinning Samaritan. This was his spiritual nourishment; and this he bequeathed to his servants; and perhaps it would argue more wisdom, as well as

¹ John iv. 32.

gratitude, did we pay less attention to the meat that perisheth, and turn our thoughts more to that which is to last for ever.

But although the interpretation of the vision is clear to us, it was not yet vouchsafed to Peter. To him it seemed no more than an invitation to satisfy his hunger by partaking freely of the various kinds of food enclosed in the sheet. But Peter had been accustomed, and conscientiously so, strictly to observe the distinction between clean and unclean animals. It had probably appeared to him one of the most important peculiarities of his early religion; and as our Lord had not made any alteration in the law, it was still enjoined by the express command of Jehovah.¹ When, therefore, the voice said, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat:" his answer was, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing common or unclean,"—a lesson to us, by the way, to keep the body in subjection; and whether we eat, or drink, to practise such temperance, and thankful contentment, as shall shew that in all things we have the honour of

¹ *Levit. xi.* *Dent. xiv.*

God at heart, as well as the refinement of our nature. It is indeed worthy of remark how much abstinence had to do in this great event: Cornelius had fasted all the forenoon; and Peter was now willing to do the same, rather than to eat any thing forbidden. Without enlarging upon this ancient custom; we may at least observe, that few things impart a tone of purity and elegance to the mind, more than an habitual controul over the appetites of eating and drinking. The ancient philosophers were alive to this; and their nights and suppers of the gods always implied meetings, at which intellectual enjoyment was the first object.¹

But “the voice spake unto Peter again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.” Peter, conscious from this repetition that the vision was divine, was naturally deeply interested. So long as the sheet remained be-

¹ For a beautiful specimen of the ideas, which even heathens were capable of conceiving upon the tendency of animal indulgences to deprave the mind, see Sallust's Introduction to the war of Catiline, one of the most spirit-stirring compositions that either Greece or Rome have bequeathed to posterity.

fore him, he fastened his eyes earnestly upon it: and when it was taken up again out of his sight, he continued pondering in his heart what it should mean. Had it been no more than the restoration of those primitive times, when God blessed Noah, and delivered all creatures into his hands to be meat for him;¹ even this would have opened a wide field of thought to a man so occupied with divine things: but probably he anticipated a deeper meaning; and, being thus prepared for some extraordinary communication, was ready to apply what he had witnessed to the first striking event that should occur. Nor was he long kept in suspense: for the narrative proceeds thus. "Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean; behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there." Thus beautifully did all things work together in answer to the centurion's prayers; and thus

¹ Gen. ix. 3.

often do our own affairs dovetail into each other with the same felicity. It is very soothing when they do so; but not without its dangers; for the world will call it fortune; self-conceit ascribe it to our own good management; and carelessness be too apt to follow the ease and comfort resulting from it. But wisdom gives the honour to whom it is due; and in such happy train of events recognizes the same providential hand, which overruled the arrival of the centurion's messengers. Had they reached the house before the vision, Peter would in all probability have refused to converse with them: for even as it was, there seems to have been a necessity for a further assurance, in order to remove his doubts. "While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." It was far from the nature of that gracious Being, whose essence is love, that the apostle should be fettered by fear, when he ought to be actively doing good. Advocate of order, he is also the author of freedom; and whilst he approves of that tender jealousy with

which the believer guards his actions, yet he encourages him to go straight to his duty, and like Moses at the red sea, or like Joshua in the valley of Achor, to act as a man.¹

“Peter,” being thus instructed, “went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.”

The character of Cornelius has been already considered; yet we have here two additional traits, which mark the high esteem in which he was held. As in the description drawn by the historian he was called a “devout” man; so now it is said by his servants, and the soldier, that he was a “just” man; and although the words may be frequently confounded, as if conveying nearly the same meaning; yet the one seems rather to imply devotion towards God,

¹ Joshua vii. 10.

the other a conscientious discharge of our duty to man for God's sake. Thus Joseph, Mary's husband, is said to have been a just man;¹ that is, one who would injure nobody; whom no private consideration would tempt to act harshly towards another; who would judge no one unheard, and rather draw a veil over the errors of a fellow-creature, than expose them even to merited reprobation; who would, in short, invariably ask himself how he should wish others to act by him, and regulate his own conduct accordingly, whether in public or in private life. None are more quick in discerning, none more fair in appreciating this spirit than soldiers: and by mentioning it as one of the remarkable features in the character of Cornelius, and coupling it with his fear of God, they evidently intended to convey to the apostle the highest possible opinion of this centurion.

We are also informed by the messengers that "Cornelius was of good report among all the nation of the Jews;" and this is a second instance of the attention which these provincials

¹ Matt. i. 19.

paid to the behaviour of the military, and of their readiness to bestow praise where it was deserved. No doubt, as in the case of a modern colony, it was a subject frequently canvassed in their domestic circles. Every officer was probably known by name; and though some may have been reprobated, and others mentioned only to be forgotten; yet every tongue was glad to dwell upon the devout and exemplary Cornelius. What an influence would such a person exercise over the public mind: when the one opinion was never met by a conflicting sentiment; but every man's testimony strengthened his neighbour's; and every fresh discussion drew forth additional evidence to confirm the general voice. The conversion of such an individual would be most impressive. If a man so holy, so benevolent, and strict in all his duties, should leave the faith of the Hebrews, and adopt the gospel of Christ, there must be something in this new religion which merited the most serious investigation. Or, again, if the dearest boon which heaven could bestow in answer to such true piety, was a belief in Jesus; how glorious must be the privileges, and how precious the

advantages, which all were encouraged to expect by embracing the same revelation. Thus powerfully would the example of an individual operate upon the whole community; nor could there have been a person pointed out more likely to create a sensation by confessing the name of our Lord, than Cornelius.

In the meanwhile the words of the messengers must have sunk deep into the heart of Peter. Even in those days of miracles the appearance of an angel was no common event; but to hear that one of these celestial heralds had been sent expressly to direct a fellow-creature to him for instruction, could not fail of awakening in his bosom emotions of the most affecting nature. It was true that the man who had sent was a Gentile; and the travellers who stood at his door were Gentiles also: but the command which he had received was vividly present with him; and the meaning of the vision which had seemed so mysterious, began now to disclose itself. An hour ago Peter would have considered himself polluted by the converse that he was holding; but he had been corrected; and beneath the plumed helmet of a

Roman soldier he recognized an adopted brother, a chosen member, like himself, of the family of his beloved Lord. Cordially, therefore, did he invite the strangers to enter, and to partake of his hospitality for the night; and ere the hour of repose drew on, delightful would be the intercourse between spirits of such a mould. Yes! if life affords one charm especially unmixed with alloy, it is when congenial minds meet together upon gospel ground; when, all reserve thrown aside, and each assured of the other, they can bring their hopes, their fears, their prospects forward, and dwell with unchecked delight upon that matchless love, which descried a way for saving sinners through a Redeemer's blood.

But the morrow's dawn appeared; and Peter having communicated the circumstance to some brethren, who were residing in the city, six of them agreed to accompany him on this interesting journey. The whole party, therefore, left the walls of Joppa, and on the following day entered Cæsarea. In the meanwhile Cornelius was anxiously expecting their arrival. He had collected his near kinsmen and friends together;

that they also might share the benefit of the apostle's visit; for his benevolent heart would have shrunk from the idea of shutting up the message of God in his own bosom; or of keeping back from others the invaluable treasures, which were about to be showered on his house. It was a moment of intense interest. Long perhaps had his prayers been offered that his mind might be enlightened; and that the way, which he knew to exist, but had hitherto been unable to explore, might be made plain before him. Those prayers had been miraculously answered; an individual had been revealed as the interpreter of the divine will; and he now sat in momentary expectation of the man, whom his imagination would invest with all the solemnity becoming such an office. As soon then as Peter reached the door, Cornelius hastened to meet him; and, with a burst of veneration, that he would not have indulged towards his emperor, he fell down at the feet of the apostle, and worshipped him. Yes, the Roman centurion, the captain of an hundred soldiers, the man of birth and affluence, prostrated himself at the feet of a Jew, and acknowledged how

worthless is all worldly distinction compared with the honour that cometh from God alone.

This reverence on the part of the centurion, and the spirit in which Peter received it, may guide our behaviour in circumstances not wholly dissimilar. Far from accepting the adoration offered him, the apostle was greatly distressed; and, raising Cornelius from the ground, declared that he also was a man, and therefore wholly unworthy to receive such homage. It may sometimes happen in our journey through the world, that we meet with ministers of the gospel, whom circumstances compel to live in a very humble style. They may be excellent men, devoted to the service of their Lord; but so situated, that a little attention would be received as a balm, and cheer them on to renewed zeal amidst the trials and disappointments which they are often doomed to experience. In such cases let us remember Cornelius; and learn from him that we are never acting a more honourable part than when we treat with generous respect the man who conscientiously fulfils the duties of a religious calling.¹ But on the other hand

¹ How touching is the following anecdote in the life of Luther,

it is most desirable that these should bear in mind Peter; neither building up unscriptural ideas of the importance of their order, nor endeavouring to establish an unwarrantable sway over the consciences of their flocks. It is true that an apostle magnified his office—but why?¹ Certainly not to raise his own authority, but to awaken a holy emulation by shewing men what privileges they were despising in the rejection of his ministry. His object, and that of his brethren, was to spread the gospel, not to exalt themselves; and when the sanctity of their cha-

when that great reformer was summoned to defend his opinions before Charles the Fifth, and the princes of the empire at the diet of Worms. ‘As he drew near the door, which was to admit him to the presence of his judges, he was met by a valiant knight, George Freundsberg, who, four years afterwards, attended by his followers, couched his lance at the battle of Pavia, and bearing down the left of the French army, drove it into the Tesino, and decided the captivity of the King of France. This old general, seeing Luther pass, touched him on the shoulder, and shaking his head, blanched in many battles, said kindly, “My poor Monk, my poor Monk, thou hast a march, and a struggle to go through, such as neither I, nor many other captains, have seen the like in our most bloody battles. But if thy cause be just, and thou art sure of it, go forward in God’s name, and fear nothing. He will not forsake thee.”—*D’Aubigne’s History of the Reformation, Vol. II.* p. 292,—a beautiful and interesting work.

¹ Rom. xi. 13.

racter, or the marvel of their miracles drew upon them any undue regard, as that of Cornelius to Peter, or of the men of Lystra to Paul and Barnabas,¹ they rejected it with an earnestness that shewed how little they desired to set themselves above the rest of mankind.

But we proceed. “And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for. I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?” Peter seems to have been at first startled at the number of people whom he found collected; and still to have thought an apology necessary for appearing amongst them: for, although this very strict separation between Jew and Gentile had not been enjoined by Moses; but had grown up from the distinction of meats peculiar to the

¹ Acts xiv. 14.

former, yet was it now so intimately familiarized with the nation, that even an apostle could not at once shake off all misgivings.¹ He however soon recovered himself; and before the assembled company, and in the presence of the brethren, who came with him, declared that God had shewn him, that the time was past for calling any one common or unclean; and that henceforth the whole world should regard itself as one family, and practice all the kindly sympathies of that endeared relationship. Why then did Cornelius send for him? and how could he shew his readiness to comply with a request made under such solemn circumstances?

¹ We condemn the prejudices of the Jews; but how much more should we reprobate a worse system of intolerance, the enmity of white men against blacks. The Jews had an excuse. They were strictly forbidden to intermarry with a gentile; and idolatry was a distinct line of separation between themselves, and those who practised it. But since the day of Cornelius a new spirit has been preached to the church; and the very fact of a negro being in his own country a poor, ignorant pagan, is one of the most imperative reasons for treating him with kindness, and endeavouring to win him over to a saving faith. There cannot be a greater perversion of Christian charity, than the contempt with which a coloured man is looked upon in communities that ought to know better; and few of her many acts of heroism have raised Great Britain to her high position, more than the conduct which she has pursued in this respect.

We know not if any painter has yet depicted this scene, but we should think it would make a fine subject for the exercise of his art. At the top of the room would stand the apostle, and his brethren, men breathing holiness, and stamped with that pure nobility, which only a life spent in virtue can impart. Around would be placed the friends of Cornelius, each bent forward in the attitude of expectation, wondering, and rejoicing in the prospect about to open before them. Lower down would be seen the tall form of the Roman legionary, watching with military steadiness the assembled group; his eye alone betraying the emotions of a bosom, that yearned, in sympathy with his beloved commander, to hear the important revelation. Amidst them all stood forth Cornelius; and whilst every countenance would be for the time directed towards him, he began, with the unaffected eloquence of a soldier, to detail the miraculous events, that had led him to send to Joppa. "Four days ago, he said, I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said,

Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side; who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee, and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." It was a solemn conclusion, but the occasion demanded it; for we read in the subsequent chapter, that the things which Peter was to tell, were "words, by which he and all his house should be saved."

And here let us again observe to whom these terms of salvation were to be proposed. Not to a sinner, in the sense in which the word is usually understood, before whose troubled conscience memory might vainly strive to recal one deed of goodness; and to whom no alternative could suggest itself, save to fall at the feet of an offended Judge, and say, "I have sinned, I am not worthy to approach thee." But to a man whose life had been one of devotion, who had

adorned piety with love, and kept love in lively exercise by piety; to such an one was Peter now commanded to declare, that even he had not discovered the way to heaven; but that there was a name still unknown to him, whereby alone he could be saved. It is difficult to imagine a more decided blow to self-righteousness; nor a more positive confirmation of the great truth, that by faith, and not by the deeds of the law, shall a man be justified. Not that the holy life of Cornelius was of no avail; for we have seen that it was treasured up as a memorial before God, and led to his receiving the distinguished mercies already related, but it could not save him. It put him in the way of finding salvation, but had no share at all in effecting it.

And as such was the decree of God, so was it implicitly acquiesced in by Cornelius. He mentions his fasts, and his alms, but merely as a repetition of the words which the angel had spoken. We see no presumption that he had been paving the way through them to eternal happiness; but with a noble simplicity he confesses that he has every thing to learn; and

leaving his merits to God, he waits like a child, for the instruction which the apostle has been commissioned to impart. Every word breathes humility, and at the same time invests the transaction with the deepest solemnity. He feels that the assembly is standing in the presence of God; and with the reverence of a heart imbued with piety, he bows his own spirit before Him, and comprehends the whole circle in the same act of adoration. Never perhaps had Cornelius looked more august, nor ever had his friends recognized more decidedly his superiority of mind. His feelings were those of true devotion; and sincerity in every thing, but especially in religion, exalts and dignifies the character.

There are many lessons to be learned from this brief narrative, which the centurion gives of his vision.

First, we may remark the way in which he passed his time. The ninth hour of the day was about three o'clock in the afternoon, a season, says Henry, when most people are engaged in business, or having finished the occupation of the morning, are preparing to sally forth and

enjoy themselves. Perhaps Cornelius frequently did the same : there is no reason why he should not have tasted the freshness of the air of heaven, or indulged in the society of his friends. But some days he certainly gave up to religious exercises ; and as far as we can judge, dedicated a portion of each to the same devout preparation for venturing abroad. David and Daniel observed a similar practice, at least they broke the interval between morning and evening by habitual devotion. It would be well for us all, did we follow the example. He, who does so, has paid a homage to his maker, and may hope to have his thoughts collected, and a mind prepared to meet with propriety whatever event shall happen. His bearing is that of a man intent on good : and every word and action carries the imprint of the sacred occupation in which he has been engaged.

Secondly, he was praying in his house. The pharisees, we are told, loved to pray in the synagogues and streets, to be seen of men ; and doubtless there were many of those ostentatious persons in Cæsarea. But the prayer of Cornelius was that of the heart, and he wished

for no witnesses of his supplications, but him to whom they were addressed. In some retired room he closed the door, and there spread forth his wants with free, unshackled fervency. The book of God was probably before him. He prayed for light and understanding ; he prayed for all most dear, his friends, his comrades, his countrymen, the Jews : and the prayer that went up in secret to heaven, came back, as we have seen, amply and openly rewarded.

Thirdly, we may observe his salutation of the apostle, and his gladness to hear of holy things. Some rejoice to receive the visit of a gay acquaintance, who will tell the news of the day, and the ever-varying occurrences of a busy world. Cornelius doubtless loved his brother officers, and cordially bid them welcome, when they called upon him ; but he loved still more to receive within his doors a servant of God. This was what his heart was in ; here he could listen with unmixed delight ; and with a warmth of feeling, which shewed how cheerful frankness, and Christian piety may adorn each other, he declared that the apostle had done well in coming at once to Cæsarea.

Fourthly. The solemnity with which he professes that himself and his friends are standing in the presence of God, deserves our best attention. God is present every where, and his eyes are always upon us; but there are certain seasons, and peculiar places, where he may be said to be especially amongst his people. On these occasions it well becomes us all to cultivate the spirit of Cornelius. "Keep thy foot, says the son of David, when thou goest to the house of God; and be more ready to hear than to offer the sacrifice of fools."¹ It is a very beautiful, nay, an affecting sight, to see especially a young man thus conduct himself, to observe a change come over him, as he enters the sacred building; worldly thoughts and recollections laid aside, and a mind concentrated with sober, quiet seriousness to receive instruction. Alas! how many of us in riper years have this lesson still to learn! How many enter a church, almost as they would a house; or, at best, as a matter of propriety, if not of curiosity. How few carry from it that which shall

¹ Eccles. v. 1.

influence the ensuing week ; and be stored and treasured up, till another holyday shall bring a new supply, and give a fresh revival to their languishing graces.

But, lastly, we would advert to the centurion's anxiety to hear all things which Peter had to say, whatever they might be. He made no reservation, no exception in favour of any particular propensity, no attempt to embrace the gospel, so far as it should not interfere with the world. How striking is the contrast between such sincerity, and the conduct of the young ruler. Both to a certain point had lived alike : the ruler had been a moral man, as well as the centurion ; and each was now inquiring, what he must do to be saved. But here began the separation ; the one went away sorrowful, because he could not find in his heart to resign his money ; the other was prepared freely, and without reserve, to give up all things. The one had not counted his cost : the other had. The one thought that he was already almost good enough ; the other that he was a poor unworthy sinner. The one loved religion for the advantage it would bring to himself ; the

other because it was the gift of a pure and holy God. The one came to Jesus without preparation ; the other had sought strength and light by fervent persevering prayer.

The tone in which Cornelius had spoken, and the grave appeal which he had made to Peter, came home to the apostle's heart. His own vision, corresponding so minutely to the one now detailed, confirmed in every particular the centurion's narrative : and as it proceeded, a sudden light seems to have burst upon him ; and a new order of things, incalculable in its effects, presented itself to his view. He saw the scheme, to which he had through life attached such vast importance, about to be demolished ; circumcision set aside ;—and piety and virtue declared to be the best recommendations to the divine favour. He saw the gentile placed on an equality with the Jew ; nay, perhaps about to be preferred before him ; and men, from whose society he would a few days sooner have shrunk, receiving the most gracious tokens of approbation, and about to be received into the church, under circumstances of the most miraculous interposition. Full of these

great ideas he “opened his mouth,” that is, he entered upon a solemn expression of the truths thus crowding upon him ; and with the energy of a man borne along by his subject, broke out into this emphatic declaration, “ Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.”

It cannot be for a moment supposed, that modes of faith should be of no consequence : for the very man, to whom Peter applied the words, was now about to be enlightened as to the only way, in which he could be saved. What the Apostle meant was, that he, who by any means has become acquainted with God, and has learned to fear and reverence him, and to practise what he thinks well-pleasing to him, is received by him as an adopted son, and shall have further grace bestowed upon him, in whatever part of the world, or under whatever circumstances he may happen to be placed. We might think, from the farewell command of his departing Lord, to preach the Gospel to every creature, that this great disciple would have long ago arrived at the same conclusion, and

have rejoiced at every opportunity of publishing so comforting a doctrine. But, if we may be permitted to hazard remarks upon so holy a person, it would seem that even Peter had need of constant progression in his religious life : and the struggling, but baffled Christian, may find consolation in reflecting, that apostles did not apprehend at once: but were still obliged to be reaching forwards ;¹ and gaining, step by step, brighter views of Gospel truth, and of the riches treasured up in Christ.

But the Apostle continued. “ The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ; (He is Lord of all;) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached ; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power ; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem ;

¹ Phil. iii. 13.

whom they slew, and hanged on a tree; him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and dead. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth on him, shall receive remission of sins."

Such were the words, in which Peter was inspired to enlighten Cornelius and his companions. It is evident that comprising, as they do, the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, his future appearance as Judge and Redeemer of the world, together with all the prophecies, of which he is the object, and the promises, of which he is the Mediator, they afford the materials on which volumes have been, and will be, written without exhausting them. We must however confine ourselves to the impression, which they would produce upon Cornelius, and to the consequences which immediately followed. And first, we have an ap-

peal to his own knowledge of many of the events, which had occurred in Judæa and Jerusalem. These Roman centurions, as has been before observed, were no careless spectators of the things which were acting around them. He had therefore heard, and enquired into their truth ; and although they had hitherto appeared to concern the Israelites only, nevertheless it was unnecessary to a person of his enlarged benevolence, that his own countrymen should be comprehended in order to make them interesting. He was aware how God had offered to those people a new religion by Jesus Christ ; how the same Jesus had preached the Gospel to them, and warned them to close with the terms of peace thus graciously propounded. He knew how pure a life this Jesus of Nazareth had led ; how God anointed him with the Holy Ghost, and with power ; so that he went about doing good, and commanding even the devils to come out of those who were possessed, and they obeyed him. All these facts were familiar to Cornelius ; for they had been published abroad throughout the country since the

time when John the Baptist finished his ministry in the wilderness.

It was a most interesting recapitulation, calculated to awaken the tenderness, and rivet the attention of the centurion. Often, we may believe, had his heart yearned after a being so powerful yet so compassionate; often had he longed to become more acquainted with the tenor of a life, distinguished by so many miracles, and by such matchless beneficence. He had doubtless imagined Jesus to be some great one; but his ideas on the subject were confused, for the veil had been not yet withdrawn from his understanding. With what readiness then would he catch at that remarkable expression, "He is Lord of all!" What a train of ideas would it give rise to! Lord of heaven and earth: Lord of men and angels: Lord of each event that happens in the universe! Every avenue of reason and veneration would thus be thrown open to admit the testimony, which Peter continued to bear to the divinity of such a personage.

Yet, strange to say, this same Lord of all, this divine Jesus, had been rejected by those,

whom he came to save ; treated as the vilest of malefactors, and put to the most ignominious of deaths. What ! had he no power to rescue himself from their hands ? Could not he, who created all things, have swept these wicked Jews from the earth, and soared triumphant over his enemies ? Or was it abounding love, that led him meek and uncomplaining to the cross ? Was it in keeping with his gentle character : and was there some cause, as yet unexplained, which would solve this apparent difficulty, and exhibit the suffering Jesus more divine, if possible, in his death, than he had been in his life ? Such reflections might pass rapidly through the bosom of the centurion ; and according to the frame of his mind would a person adopt the one, or the other solution. Which he chose there can be little doubt ; so that, as Peter continued to affirm how God would not suffer his Holy One to see corruption, but raised him up from the dead ; and shewed him openly, not to all the people, but to chosen witnesses, with whom he both eat and drank, and of whom Peter himself was one, the current of Cornelius's thoughts, untroubled by

doubts as to the possibility of such things, joined in harmonious flow with the Apostle's narrative, as it now approached the consummation of this whole transaction. "And he commanded us, continued Peter, to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he, which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

The prayers of Cornelius were answered. A light was set before him: and although the revelation was concise, yet was it sufficient for his immediate apprehension, and for the guidance of his future enquiries. Jesus then was the Lord. That lowly sufferer was indeed Messiah; and would come hereafter with majesty corresponding to his character, to sit in judgment on the world. The allusions of the prophets, hitherto so mysterious, were now explained. Here was "the light of the gentiles,"¹ "the Redeemer of Israel."² "He that should be cut off, but not for himself;"³ by

¹ Isaiah xlix. 6.

² Dan. ix. 26.

³ Zech. ix. 11.

the “ blood of whose covenant ” pardon should be purchased for all, who would believe in his name. Of such Cornelius would have been a bright example; and he would now sigh and pray for a living perception of the faith, as he had heretofore implored a knowledge of its terms. Every day would find him pondering over the scriptures; no longer indeed uncertain of his way; but now anxious to have it spiritually applied, that he might bring forth fruits worthy of his new vocation.

But very gracious is God; and great encouragement does he give to all to prepare their hearts before him. Behold! while Peter was yet speaking, and ere his hearers had leisure to meditate upon the wonderful doctrines proposed to them, “ The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.” The same divine Spirit which had sanctified the Jewish converts on the day of Pentecost, now descended with equal energy upon this primitive gentile church. Joy and peace entered their bosoms; affections, hitherto unknown, towards God, and towards man, took fire within them; a crucified Saviour became manifest in his loveliness; and the stu-

pendous work of redemption stood before them in all the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of its divinity. Who shall analyze the sensations which now pervaded that blessed assembly? Who shall describe the adoring gratitude which overwhelmed those gentile converts, as, speaking with divers tongues, they recognized in their own persons that well-known symbol of miraculous power? who the astonishment of their Hebrew brethren? Who shall depict the deep emotion, which would lead them, one and all, to devote themselves to the service of him, who died for them?

Such was the blessed conclusion of the apostle's preaching. There was nothing particularly eloquent in his discourse, no enticing word of man's wisdom; but a plain and simple statement of gospel truths, such as any one might deliver. It was the power of God, that power which is often displayed under similar circumstances, and which can give effect to the homeliest discourse, that blessed the whole transaction to Cornelius, and his companions. They longed for spiritual knowledge; and their desires were satisfied.

And now the apostle yielded to the force of these combined miracles. "Can any one," he exclaimed, "forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we?" We will not discuss the mysteries of baptism, satisfied that it is a rite, ordained by Christ himself; and the oath by which we bind ourselves to fight manfully under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil. With that of adults we have now little practically to do; and whether the Holy Ghost is invariably imparted to every infant; whether nothing depends upon the measure of faith, with which his Godfathers and Godmothers enter into suretyship for him, or upon the fervency of the prayers, which his parents offer in his behalf; or whether by any passage in scripture we are authorized to tie down Him, whose operations are free as the wind, and to assert that baptism and regeneration are of necessity simultaneous: these are questions, upon which, being among the deep things of God, we confess our incompetency, and therefore unwillingness to enter. At the same time we cannot but remark, the great importance

attached to its celebration by St. Peter. Cornelius and his companions had received the Holy Ghost ; yea, they had been distinguished by the miraculous gift of tongues ; yet, Peter, so far from considering baptism unnecessary after this manifest effusion of the Spirit, drew from thence his strongest argument for its being administered. Baptism then is not a ceremony to be carelessly gone through. It is the dedication of a soul to God ; the reception of a new member into the Christian flock. Let it be a season of joy, but of holy joy : and as the parent and the sponsor bend over the unconscious creature, whose highest interests they have vowed to cherish ; let them not return to the world with thoughtless indifference ; but remember the enemies, with whom he will have to contend, and prepare in earnest to do their duty in arming him for the conflict.

But we must bid farewell to Cornelius. We leave him sanctified by the Spirit ; endowed with the power of speaking in divers languages ; sealed to the faith by the sacrament of baptism ; and favoured with the society of Peter, whom he and his friends invited to become their

guest, and who would direct and confirm him in his way. What course of life he pursued, or whether he continued in the army, we have no means of ascertaining; but that he gave himself to his Saviour, and strove to act up to the revelation so marvellously vouchsafed to him, there cannot be a doubt. Whether Cæsarea had the happiness of retaining him; or whether his routine of duty called him to other countries, that precious deposit would still be with him, the object of his tenderest solicitude, the mainspring of all his actions. His first love would never be left, but the works which he would do at the close of life would be as zealous, and full of affection as on the day of his conversion. More highly favoured than his predecessor at Capernaum, the streams of beneficence would flow from him in a more refined and spiritual volume. His generous heart expanded by divine grace, and the facility of addressing all men in their own language, would embrace the habitable world, and pierce the remotest darkness. The idolatry of the Roman soldier, the unbelief of the Jew, the vices of the barbarous pagan would alike excite his

compassion, and stimulate him to disperse in a wider and wider range the only but sovereign remedy for the miseries of mankind. The grace so liberally given would neither be put under a bushel, nor hidden in the ground ; and it is by no means unreasonable to conclude that amongst the early confessors, by whose exertions the seeds of Christianity were sown, few names will appear more conspicuous on the great day of reckoning than those of Cornelius, and his honoured companions.

THE END.

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